RP won't extradite Commander Robot to Germany

Story on PAGE A2

Palace boys buying 'Otso-otso' for GMA

By Juliet L. Javellana

WILL President Macapagal-Arroyo dance "otso-otso" on the campaign trail?

Ms Macapagal, who is seeking a full six-year term in the May elections, laughed

PALACE/ A5

PHILIPPINE DAILY
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WHAT'S INSIDE

- **Moody's says RP far from 'fiscal crisis'** BUSINESS /B1
- **GMA junks 'Jose Pidal' bid** ACROSS /A15
- **Truck bomb blast kills 10 in Iraq** WORLD /A10

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VAL HANDUMON

HANGING on for dear life she's not, but President Macapagal takes the LRT train from Blumentritt to the Edsa station on Taft Avenue where the deadly Dec. 30, 2000, bombing occurred. She inspects the LRT, MRT and PNR trains on Wednesday to check out if security measures are in place for the frenzied holiday commutes.

PRAYED over only in October by Bro. Eddie Villanueva, head of Jesus Is Lord, on the religious group's 25th anniversary, President Macapagal may now face her spiritual benefactor as a presidential rival.

PDI PHOTO

Bro. Eddie worries GMA

She fails to get a commitment from him not to run

By Juliet Labog-Javellana and Blanche S. Rivera

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo had an emotional meeting with Jesus Is Lord (JIL) leader Bro. Eddie Villanueva to dissuade him from pursuing his planned run for the presidency, but failed to elicit a commitment from him.

Asked to confirm reports that Ms Macapagal wept during the meeting, Speaker Jose de Venecia said she was teary-eyed.

"Because the discussions were very solemn and the ideas that were being proposed are revolutionary—how to dramatically reduce corruption in the country. And the President and Bishop Villanueva agreed that this should enjoy the highest political priority," De Venecia said.

He also said Ms Macapagal told Villanueva of her determination to launch her reform program and zero in on the battle against drugs and corruption.

The two camps agreed to meet again and to conduct a survey of presidential contenders "to guide us in our mutual decision," De Venecia Jr. said yesterday.

De Venecia and former President Fidel Ramos accompanied Ms Macapagal to the meeting, which took place Tuesday

BRO. EDDIE/ A8

'FPJ, Ping run won't divide opposition'

By Christine O. Avendaño and Cynthia D. Balana

BOTH actor Fernando Poe Jr. and Sen. Panfilo Lacson appear bent on running in 2004, but Sen. Edgardo Angara is confident that this will not divide the opposition.

Responding yesterday to questions from reporters as to whether the apparently certain candidacies of the two men would split the opposition, Angara said: "The opposition will remain, at the core, solid and undivided."

As far as Angara is concerned, the opposition was "unified" with the formation of the Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino (KPN), which has declared Poe its standard-bearer in next year's elections.

"Any one who strays from the unity of the opposition would be running at his own risk, and he would not be able to claim that he'll be running under the opposition," said Angara, president and chair of the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino that recently merged with the Puwersa ng Masang Pilipino, PDP-Laban and other small parties to form the KPN.

Angara said he did not think that Lac-

FPJ/ A8

ALL HONORS are accorded the late Foreign Secretary Blas Ople as the funeral car bearing his casket goes by the Department of Labor building in Intramuros where he was labor secretary for 18 years.

ERIK ARAZAS

Ople called a demigod, prophet, enigma

By Michael Lim Ubac

IN DEATH, former Senate President Blas Ople has become an "immortal" of sorts to his former colleagues in the Senate.

At the necrological rites in the Senate yesterday morning, past and present members of the chamber lavished him with lofty words, with some calling him a "demigod" and "prophet."

To eulogize Ople, former Sen. Francisco Tatad quoted T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding;" former Sen. Ernesto Herrera quoted an English poet; and Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. quoted the parable of the prophet in the Bible.

Borrowing the words of the late British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Pimentel extolled Ople as a "tremendous success" as a public servant and "a baffling figure, a 'riddle wrapped in an enigma.'"

"Whatever be the theories why Ka Blas was such a successful public figure, it cannot be discounted that there has always been a Divine Providence who was probably telling us that if the little town of Bethlehem could provide a stable for the infant Savior of the world, the hum-

OPLE/ A8

Guns fall silent after gov't-MILF ceasefire

By PDI Mindanao Bureau

COTABATO CITY—Guns fell silent in Maguindanao yesterday as Moro rebels and government troops signed a ceasefire agreement after several days of clashes that had killed at least 16 people.

In a statement, President Macapagal-Arroyo dismissed the fighting as an "isolated incident that will not derail the peace process."

Military and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) officials announced that the "localized" ceasefire would cover Datu Piang, Talayan and Talitay towns in Maguindanao. The agreement was signed at around 10 p.m. on Tuesday.

The moratorium was reached after Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia, Armed Forces vice chief of staff and chair of the government's ceasefire committee, and his MILF counterpart, Benjie Midtimbang, talked over the phone on Tuesday night.

"Both sides agreed to disengage to give the ceasefire committees a chance to enter and retrieve the cadavers and the prisoners of war," said Ghazali Jaafar, MILF political affairs chief.

Fighting broke out after MILF rebels attacked government troops who were trying to stop members of the notorious

GUNS/ A5

Make way, here come Roco's angels

By Dona Pazzibugan

DREW Barrymore, Cameron Diaz and Lucy Liu they are not, but they call themselves angels.

Move over "Charlie's Angels," here come "Roco's Angels."

Unlike the sexy stars in the Hollywood detective movie, Roco's "angels" are young and middle-aged men and women who believe the former senator should be the next president, they pray.

In Metro Manila alone, there are now at least 5,000 people committed to pray at specific times of the day until Election Day for Roco's presidential bid, according to Ofelia Valiente, a businesswoman

MAKE/ A9

GALING PILIPINO'S LIGHT A TREE FOR UNITY

The movement that spearheads activities to inspire the Filipinos to affirm and spread what is good and excellent about being Filipino conducts the lighting of a cluster of giant Christmas trees at the Luneta to benefit five major causes.

JIM GUIAO PUNZALAN

Politicians start getting NPA passes

MANY politicians, including President Macapagal-Arroyo's allies, have started applying for safe conduct passes from the communist New People's Army to campaign in certain NPA-controlled areas ahead of the elections in May, according to a rebel spokesperson.

Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal, spokesperson of the Communist Party of the Philippines that oversees NPA operations, said candidates must pay the permit-to-campaign fees "as a sign of recognition of the political authority of the people's democratic government in revolutionary areas."

President Macapagal-Arroyo earlier urged candidates not to pay the fees as she ordered the military and police to crack down on these extortion activities by the NPA.

Rosal, however, claimed that members of Ms Macapagal's own party and allies who plan to run for local and national posts "have this early already

POLITICIANS/ A4

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Visayas and Mindanao including Palawan will experience cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers and thunderstorms becoming widespread over Mindanao. Luzon will be partly cloudy to at times cloudy with isolated rainshowers.

SOURCE: PAGASA

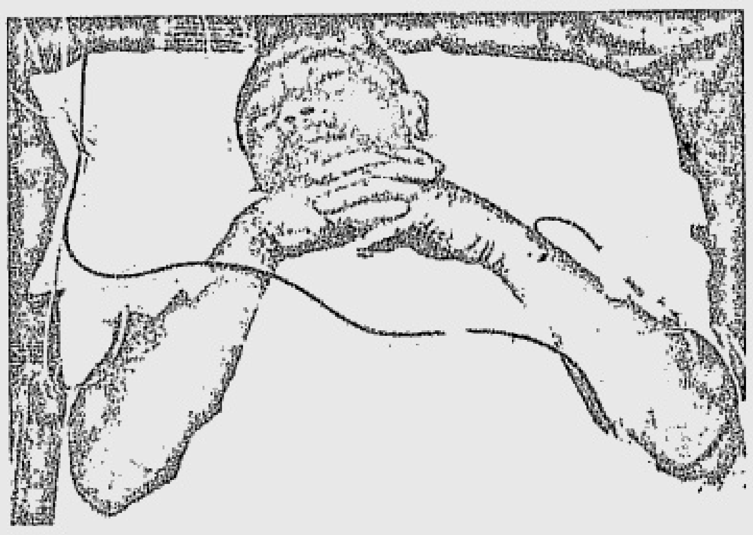
COMPILED BY: RAY LEYESA, PDI RESEARCH/12/18/03

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	Gen. Santos	Widespread Rains
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Zamboanga	Widespread Rains
Legazpi	Partly Cloudy	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
*Calapan	Partly Cloudy	Davao	Cloudy with Rains

RP won't give Robot to Germans

By Gil C. Cabacungan, Jerome Aning and TJ Burgonio

MALACAÑANG has turned down a request from a German court to extradite captured Abu Sayyaf leader Galib Andang but has assured Germany that it would share all intelligence information obtained from the terrorist better known under his *nom de guerre* Commander Robot.


GALIB Andang: No extradition

Presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye said the Philippines should get "first crack" at interrogating and prosecuting Robot who is believed to have led the Abu Sayyaf in the kidnapping of 21 mainly European hostages from a Malaysian resort and held captive for several months in 2000.

"We will assure the Germans and other foreign allies that we will share all intelligence information we can get out of Andang. We also want to assure that justice will prevail in Andang's case," Bunye said in a phone interview.

Bunye also noted that the Philippines was not compelled to extradite Robot to Germany because there is no extradition treaty between the two countries.

The German-based "Der Spiegel" magazine reported on its website on Tuesday that a court in the German city of Goettingen, Lower Saxony, wanted to try Andang for his role in the kidnapping of three Germans who were among the 21 hostages from Sipadan kept hostage on Jolo island.

The foreign ministry in Berlin could not confirm the information, saying it should contact the court which also could not be reached.

Foreign Affairs undersecretary Franklin Ebdalin also said the Philippines has no obligation to surrender Andang because the country does not have an extradition treaty with Germany.

"We don't normally surrender our nationals to another country unless we have an extradition treaty," he explained.

A German public prosecutor filed the case against Robot and other Abu Sayyaf leaders on behalf of the German kidnap victims, Werner and Renate Wallert and their son Marc.

Millions of dollars were reportedly paid to the bandits for the release of some of the hostages.

The military yesterday said that it was up to the courts to decide whether Robot should be surrendered to Germany.

"We will adhere to the decision of the courts. That's beyond us. We will place him in our custody until the court decides what to do with him," said Commodore Tirso Danga, chief of the Armed Forces Intelligence Service.

Danga said that Robot, who is recovering from an operation on his left leg and serious wounds in the right leg at the V. Luna Medical Center in Quezon City, would receive medical treatment.

Earlier, the military said it had no objection to Malaysian authorities' plan to question the 36-year-old Robot for his alleged role in the Sipadan kidnapping, which included nine Malaysians, as this was covered by the antiterror agreement between the Philippines and Malaysia.

Malaysian Defense Minister Najib Razak has said that a team was being readied to interview Robot.

"There should be no problem in giving the Malaysians access to Galib Andang. But we'll have to wait for Andang to be ready for such an interview or interrogation," said Armed Forces vice chief Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia.

Garcia noted that Robot's VMMC doctors had advised against any interrogation while he remained at the intensive care unit.

But yesterday military information officer Lt. Col. Daniel Lucero said Robot, who had been diagnosed with liver and kidney problems last week, was recovering.

His anemia had been corrected while his blood pressure had normalized, Lucero quoted his doctors as saying. The condition of his kidneys and liver has also improved, said the doctors who added they were only concerned about the infection in his right leg.

Andang's arrest on Dec. 7 was a major blow to the Abu Sayyaf which has carried out numerous kidnappings and deadly bombings in the past decade.

The bandit group, which has been linked to Osama bin Laden's international terror group, is also accused of killing two American hostages.

Canada travel ban: What for?

MALACAÑANG yesterday protested Canada's issuance of a new travel advisory to its citizens against travel to the Philippines due to bombings, kidnappings and growing violence in the country.

In a statement, presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye branded the Canadian travel advisory as "baseless and misplaced."

Bunye said there have been no cases of kidnapping, bank robbery and carnapping since the government established checkpoints in Metro Manila (which will be expanded to Regions 3 and 4) and adopted the beat patrol system.

"Incidents of terrorism have dropped to nil," Bunye insisted. "Fairness demands that we take into account the positive effects of ongoing anti-crime measures."

Canada warned its citizens Tuesday against travel to the Muslim sections of Mindanao due to kidnappings. It also said "some gangs have used extreme violence and have targeted business individuals and visitors." *Gil C. Cabacungan Jr. with AFP report*

No. 7 on kidnap wanted list falls

By Christian V. Esguerra

FOUR kidnappers and counting.

Police arrested on Monday night the no. 7 man on the government's list of 10 most wanted kidnappers, bringing down to six the number of notorious kidnap suspects still being hunted by a newly re-invigorated anti-kidnapping drive.

A tip from an Iloilo resident led to the capture of Jose Lim Arnuco, 41, a former Army corporal wanted for his alleged involvement in the kidnapping of Mark Jan Giga and Maeling Ang in Quezon City.

Acting on the information, members of the Police Anti-Crime Emergency Response (Pacer) team led by Chief Insp. Ipil Dueñas stormed Arnuco's safe house in Barangay Seol Norte in Leon town at abound 8:30 p.m. on Monday.

Arnuco, a key member of the Pegarido kidnap gang who is also affiliated with the faction of the Philippine Guardians Brotherhood led by perennial coup suspect Sen. Gregorio Honasan, was presented to President Macapagal-Arroyo by Angelo Reyes, chief of the National Anti-Kidnapping Task Force, at press briefing in Camp Crame yesterday evening.

The informant will receive the P750,000 reward for the capture of Arnuco.

Reyes said informants would have a "happy Christmas" as he asked the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces to speed up the processing of the documents for the release of the funds.

The President told reporters the campaign against kidnapping has been "getting a lot of praise especially from the Filipino-Chinese community" as she congratulated the Naktaf for "a job well-done."

So pleased was Ms Macapagal that she announced yesterday that all police and military officers would each receive a Christmas bonus of P5,000.

In the past, only civilian government employees received this bonus, she said.

The Naktaf earlier killed the top kidnapper on its list, Dr. Roberto Obeles Yap. This was followed by the capture of Vilmor Catamco and Allan Niegas in the Visayas.

Despite this string of victories, however, Reyes said the Naktaf would not dismantle the police and military "choke points" and mobile checkpoints that it has set up in 11 major roads leading to Metro Manila.

He said the President has even instructed that this security measure be expanded to regions 3 and 4 (Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog).

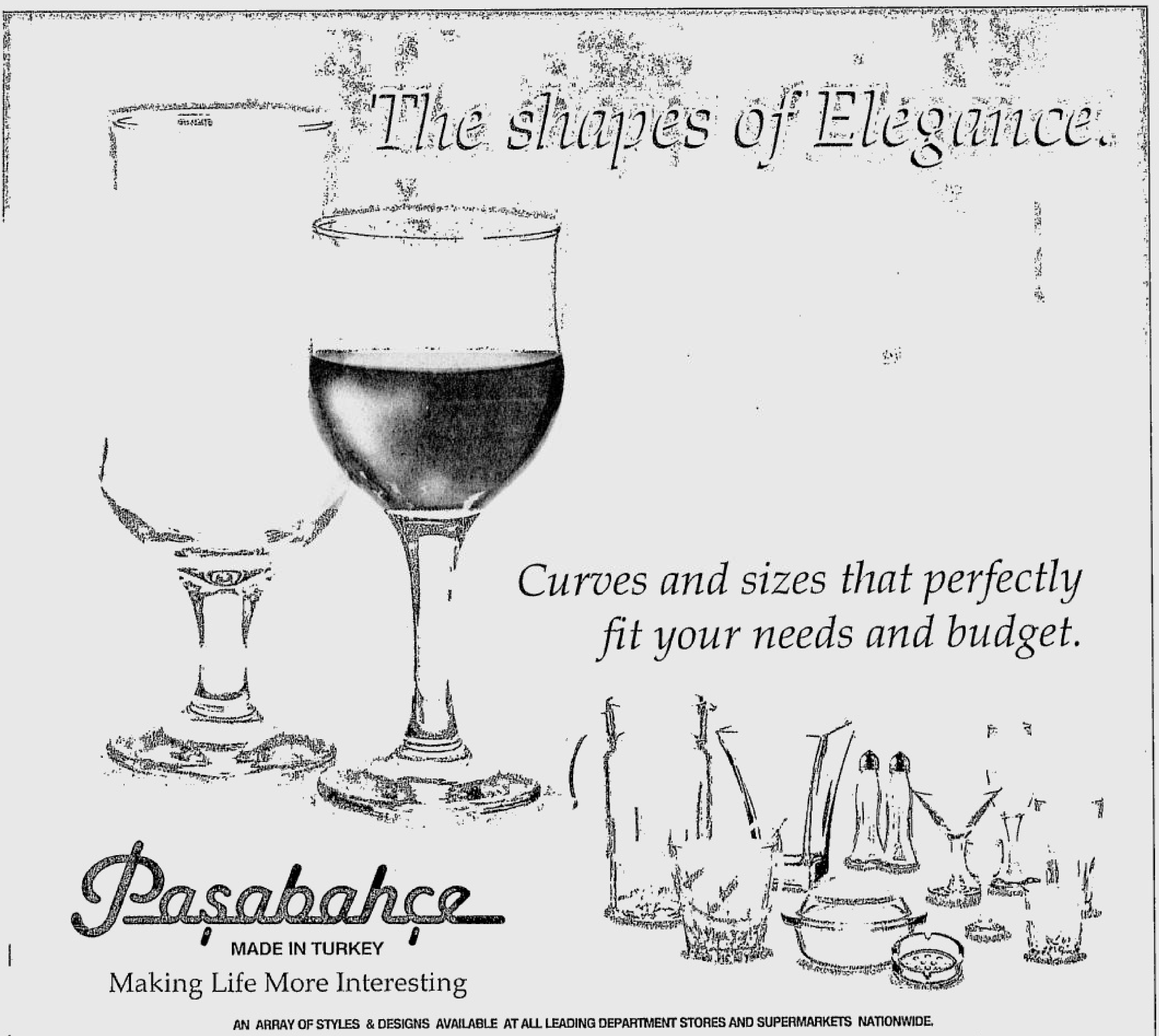
"Kidnapping cannot be viewed as a (purely) Metro Manila operation because kidnap gangs also maintain safe houses in region 3 and region 4," Reyes said.

Ms Macapagal is set to meet with local officials from these two regions to map out security strategies against kidnap-for-ransom syndicates.

With nearly half of the 10 most wanted kidnappers either captured or killed, the Naktaf has come up with a second list of another 14 suspected kidnap gang members.

They were identified as: PO2 Allan Estrada, Teddy Padre, Neil Cutad, Felizardo Pagulayan, Romeo Puria, Ronnie Tan, Sergio and More Panday, Arnel Suellen, Mario Valerio, Jose Bunales, Pecasiano Tagle, and Ambrudin Macasilang.

The government has set a P1 million reward for Estrada's capture and P500,000 each for the rest.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Low-cost housing: Give some, take some

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo distributed some 800 housing units yesterday in Smokey Mountain in Tondo where she attended the second day of the traditional *misa de gallo* (dawn masses or *simbang gabi* in Filipino).

But while the President has made housing development a priority for the homeless poor, at least 30,000 low- and middle-income homeowners are in danger of losing their homes starting next January when the government starts foreclosing on low-income and socialized housing units, according to a congressman.

The President was in Smokey Mountain to fulfill a promise to celebrate *misa de gallo* with the residents of the former dumpsite that has been turned into a housing development, said National Housing Authority general manager Edgardo D. Pamintuan.

Sanlakas Rep. JV Bautista has decried what he called the the "alarming" trend of foreclosures that would cover 126 government subdivisions and housing projects in Metro Manila, Laguna, Cavite, Bulacan, Samar, Negros Occidental, Davao and Cagayan de Oro.

Bautista said the ones affected are people who have been religiously paying their amortizations and are willing to continue to do so.

GMA: Amnesty to cover political foes, too

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

TAKING her reconciliation efforts further, President Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday said she would grant general amnesty not only to Muslim secessionists and communist rebels but also to her political foes.

Ms Macapagal said the proposed general amnesty proclamation which she would submit to Congress includes out-of-court settlement with "those involved in past political conflicts."

The President said that a five-man healing and reconciliation commission will identify persons, institutions and organizations which will be granted general amnesty.

Asked if the Marcoses and those associated with ousted President Joseph Estrada, would be covered by the amnesty, the President said: "I did not give any specific names. It is going to be this commission so I did not give anything about specific persons because I'm going into strategic directions but the operational decisions would be done by this commission."

On whether the Marcoses, Estrada and the Oakwood mutineers could be covered, she said: "Well, precisely it is called past political conflicts, that's what it is called."

Her draft amnesty bill indicated her policy to seek out-of-court settlements with the Marcos and Estrada groups.

In its explanatory note, the draft bill said: "The policy of said commission is clear: a need to shift the adversarial and antagonistic nature of judicial and extra-judicial proceedings to a more conciliatory and compromising mode to make effective the government's effort of wealth recovery and bring together different political groups/parties and pave the way for a comprehensive peace and reconciliation agenda."

The amnesty bill also proposes the creation of a Committee on Wealth Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction. "The Presidential Commission on Good Government, its powers and functions are hereby integrated in this committee," the bill said.

But Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. was non-committal about the proposal.

"It depends upon the will of Congress," he said when asked if Estrada and the Marcoses could be given amnesty. "Maybe in the second or third phase, depending upon how fast reconciliation can be achieved with justice," De Venecia said.

House Majority Leader Neptali Gonzales said that while the President's intentions were noble, the inclusion of political groups like Estrada and the Marcoses could spark a contentious and protracted debate.

Gonzales said pardon and amnesty can be given to people after they were convicted.

"I don't suppose that plunder, by any stretch of the imagination, will be considered a political crime because that is large-scale graft and corruption," Gonzales said.

Estrada is still being tried for plunder while the Marcoses are facing charges of amassing ill-gotten wealth.

Ms Macapagal said her proposed amnesty was "more generic, more comprehensive" than the existing amnesty program for leftist and communist rebels.

She said the implementation of the amnesty depends on Congress.

"It will really depend on when Congress will act on it but this is certainly part of my (programs), after two and a half years that I have studied this and consulted (various sectors), this is certainly one of the fundamental reforms that we need so that we can have reconciliation and unity in this country," she told reporters.

The President earlier unveiled her plan to seek reconciliation with all anti-government forces, including communist and secessionist rebels, the Marcos group and the Edsa III forces of Estrada.

Erap told: Don't spoil Christmas for cops, families

By Armand N. Nocum

GOVERNMENT prosecutors yesterday appealed to jailed ex-president Estrada not to spoil Christmas for the hundreds of policemen who will have to spend Christmas and New Year celebrations away from their families so he can be with his mother.

The Sandiganbayan hearing the plunder case against Estrada yesterday heard arguments on a motion from the jailed leader asking that he be given a 10-day furlough, from Dec. 24 to Jan. 2, so he can spend Christmas with his 98-year-old mother in the latter's San Juan home.

Special Prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio said Estrada would be depriving soldiers of their Christmas if he has his way because they would have to be on guard duty.

"Every time [Estrada] moves, two helicopters are always on standby on a 24-hour basis along with his big number of escorts and security. We should remember too that these police and military personnel have the right to spend Christmas," he said.

He warned that granting Estrada's request would open the floodgates to other petitions from inmates demanding the same special privilege.

He said several inmates have filed motions to be allowed to vote in next May's elections. Estrada was allowed to vote in the 2001 elections.

Villa-Ignacio also noted that apart from depriving the policemen of their Christmas, transferring Estrada from Camp Capinpin in Tanay, Rizal where he is detained to San Juan would be an expensive operation which is to be paid for by the government.

But Jose Flaminiano, one of Estrada's court-appointed lawyers, argued that Estrada's situation was "peculiar" and could not be compared to that of other inmates.

"The accused here is a former President and this motion is peculiar. There is no rule prohibiting this, no rule allowing it. The court has powers to deal with this," Flaminiano said.

Villa-Ignacio suggested that Estrada instead ask his family to spend Christmas and New Year in the Estrada family rest house near Camp Capinpin. He said they can visit him from there.

He said the state would have no objection for his mother to be brought to the Estrada villa so she can be with her son.

It's all up to the court, says GMA

SHE might be feeling his pain but President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has left it entirely to the court's discretion if former President Joseph Estrada could spend the Yuletide season with his 98-year old mother.

In a statement, presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye said that while the President has declared that Estrada be extended "humanitarian compassion," "she has left the matter of granting him a Christmas furlough to the exclusive jurisdiction of the court."

Bunye said the President would abide and will respect the court's decision on whether Estrada could spend Christmas with his mother in San Juan, Metro Manila.

Loony bets told: Please don't run

By Martin P. Marfil

A DOCTOR has this advice to presidential aspirants with "psychotic" delusions and those with "eccentric" behavior.

Candidates with psychotic delusions should seek the help of a psychiatrist or run to the National Mental Hospital, instead of running for the highest position in the land.

On the other hand, "eccentric" candidates can run since doing so might do them good as failure might prove helpful to them.

Dr. Bernardino Vicente, the chief of the NMH, made the unsolicited advice after noting that some of the first batch of presidential candidates turned out to have psychotic delusions of being the "Messiah" and "Jesus Christ" while others exhibit "eccentric" behavior.

"If they have delusions, psychotic delusions ... they should see a psychiatrist or go to the National Mental Hospital," Vicente said in a phone interview.

The first woman presidential candidate who called herself "Salve Bush" even claimed that she is related to US President George Bush.

Vicente noted that certain characters surface in almost every election and they are not barred from filing their certificates of candidacy.

"They may be psychotic, super-eccentrics or suffering from delusions of grandeur... illogical, who believe that they can handle (the candidacy)... Some may have messianic complex, while 'Jesus Christ' is 'grandiose,' common in psychiatry in schizophrenic patients..." he said, commenting on the first batch of candidates.

For eccentrics, the NMH chief said that running for public office is their right and that it might be good for them to participate in the elections as this could check their eccentricity.

"Once they get zero votes, they might realize (that they are wrong)," he said.

Most eccentrics, Vicente said, are harmless except if they also exhibit paranoia.

Citing the woman who claims that she has a relationship with Bush, Vicente said that she might get to think that she is important as she is close to Bush and that some people might be out to get her and that she might lash out at these "people."

"But if it remains a fantasy, there is no harm," the doctor said.

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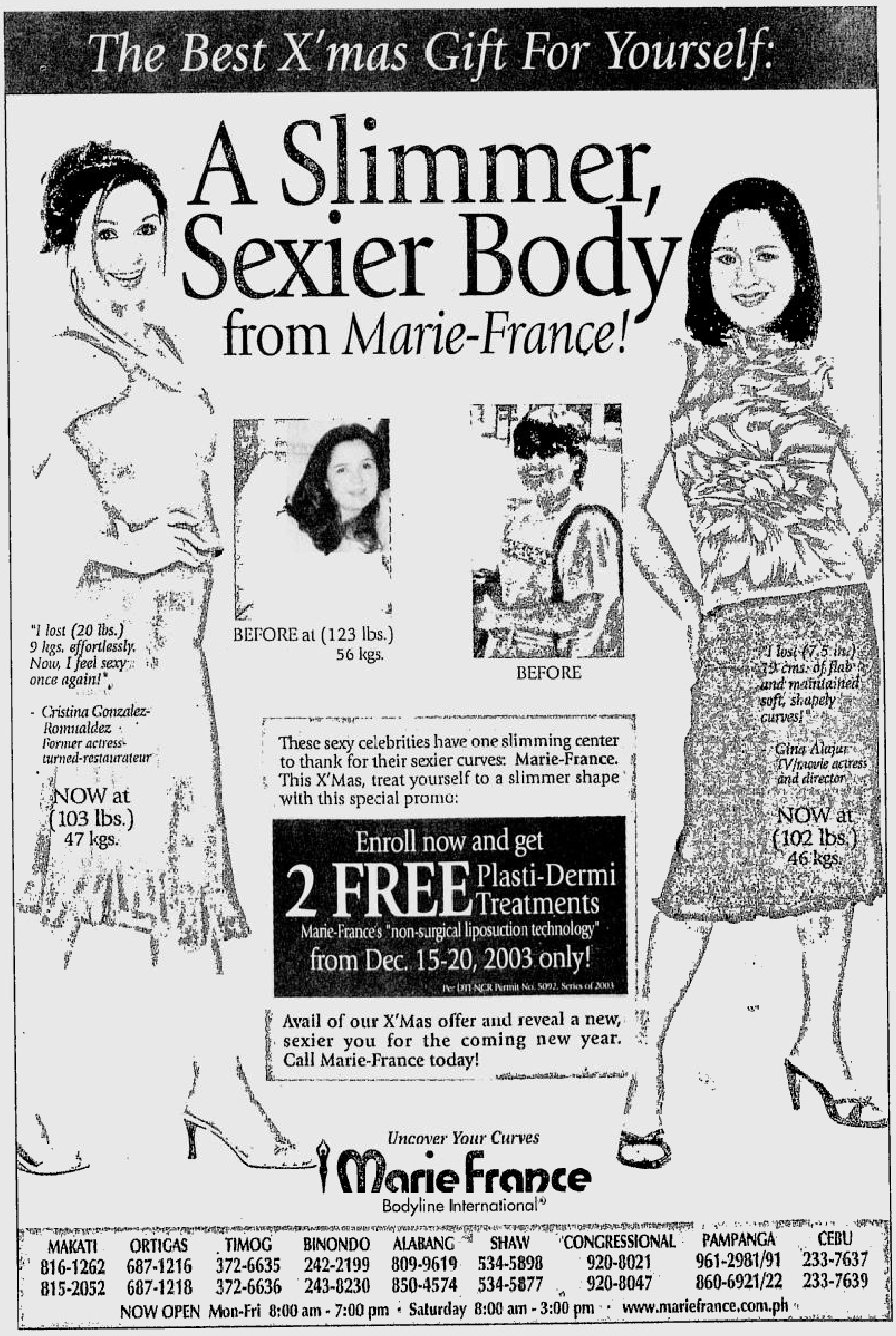
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On 20 February 2003, officers of the National Bureau of Investigation, authorized by a search warrant issued by the Regional Trial Court of Pasay City, Branch 119, conducted a search and raid of the premises of CCS Motor Parts Inc. located at 2468 and 2470 Dominga Street, Pasay City. During the raid, fake products of HKT Corporation, specifically imitations of HKT Corporation's Glow **Plugs** with Product Type Nos. PI-42, PI-43, PI-46, PM-65, PM-73, PM-75, PT-103, and PT-107, were found and seized by the operatives of the NBI. Also during the same raid, fake products of New Era Company Ltd., specifically imitations of New Era Company Ltd.'s Voltage Regulators with Product Type Nos. AVR-615 and AVR-553 were found and seized by the operatives of the NBI. The NBI operatives seized a significant amount of fake HKT products and fake New Era products.

HKT Corporation and New Era Company Ltd. have already filed the pertinent criminal and civil complaint-civil charges against CCS Motor Parts Inc. and its officers. If convicted, the parties may be subject to penalties of up to five (5) years imprisonment plus fine.

HKT Corporation and New Era Company Ltd. hereby warn all other establishments selling or distributing products infringing their trademark and product designs that they would not hesitate to bear down the full weight of the law on any party, individual, or establishment engaged in the traffic of fake products.

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Intramuros, Manila

PDI FILE PHOTO

KA ROGER: Government has no effective way of halting collection of election campaign fees.

Politicians start getting NPA passes

From page A1

submitted applications for (permits)."

"In reality, (Ms Macapagal) and her military and police have no effective way of halting the collection of election campaign fees in widespread areas effectively controlled by the NPA," Rosal said in a statement.

Candidates would be allowed to enter NPA areas only if they were able to present a campaign permit, according to Rosal.

He added that the collections would be used to finance NPA operations as well as for agricultural, medical and educational projects.

Act of social justice

"The collection of such fees is actually an act of social justice. This is one way of returning to the people what the politicians have robbed from them," Rosal said.

Lt. Gen. Romeo Dominguez, chief of the Northern Luzon Command, said the military alone would not be able to stop the NPA's collection of permit-to-campaign fees.

"We can't stop the practice without the complete cooperation of everybody, especially politicians and candidates," Dominguez said.

Pay thru ATM

He said the communist rebels had started negotiating with candidates on the amount of permit-to-campaign fees through text messages, mobile phone calls and e-mail. Payment of fees are done through automated teller machines, he added.

Dominguez welcomed House Bill No. 6581, filed by Rep. Loretta Ann Rosales (Akbayan), which sought to criminalize the NPA collection of permit-to-campaign fees.

The AFP claimed that the NPA could collect as much as P2.25 billion from permit-to-campaign fees next year.

The Commission on Elections expects about 450,000 candidates to contest more than 12,000 national, local and congressional posts in the May 10 elections—from the president down to village leaders. The filing of certificates of candidacy ends Jan. 2, and the 90-day campaign period starts Feb. 10.

NPA presence

The military says NPA guerrillas have a presence or wield influence in about 2,400 of the country's 42,000 barangays—the number having been reduced in recent years because of military operations and government efforts to improve the lives of rural folk. The rebels claim a wider area of influence but have not given details.

NPA guerrillas, currently estimated by the military to number about 9,300, have been waging a Marxist rebellion since the late 1960s.

Other fund sources dry up

Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita said last week that the NPA was stepping up its extortion "to make up for lost contributions coming from abroad" after the United States declared the group a "foreign terrorist organization." The United States, European Union, Australia and Canada have also pledged to freeze the NPA's assets, he said.

P50,000 for Congress

Ermita said the NPA had ordered candidates contesting for seats in Congress to pay them P500,000 if they campaigned in rebel areas of influence. Gubernatorial bets have been asked to pay P300,000 and mayoral candidates P50,000.

In the past, candidates without rebel passes have been ambushed. *Reports from Tonette Orejas and Jo Clemente, PDI Central Luzon Desk; AP and AFP*

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20th Ave.-P. Tuazon
Araneta Center

10:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Ortigas-Robinsons Galleria

10:30 AM to 4:30 PM
New Divisoria Market

12:00 NN to 6:00 PM
Divisoria Center

December 24 (Wed)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Farmers Plaza

December 26 (Fri)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
EDSA-Cubao Aurora
El Cano
Head Office
Honorio Lopez Blvd.-Balut
North Bay Boulevard
Quiapo
Redemptorist-Baclaran
Sta. Monica-Novaliches
Sto. Cristo
Sto. Cristo-San Nicolas
Susano Rd.-Novaliches

12:00 PM to 6:00 PM
Ortigas-San Miguel Ave.

December 27 (Sat)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
New Divisoria Market

10:00 AM to 4:00 PM
Ortigas-Robinsons Galleria

January 2 (Fri)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
EDSA-Cubao Aurora
Head Office
Quiapo
Tutuban Centermall II

12:00 PM to 6:00 PM
Ortigas-San Miguel Ave.

January 3 (Sat)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Divisoria Center
McArthur Highway-Malinta

LUZON

December 20 (Sat)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Baguio-Bonifacio
Bauan, Batangas
Calamba-Parian
Carmen, Pangasinan
Ilagan
La Union-Main
Legaspi-Mabini
Lucena-Main
San Pablo-Regidor
Santiago-City Road
Tayug-Pangasinan
Urdaneta-Pangasinan

December 24 (Wed)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Apalit
Nasugbu, Batangas
Rosario, Batangas

December 26 (Fri)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Legazpi-Rizal
Tabaco

December 27 (Sat)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Agoo, La Union
Baguio-Cariño
Baguio-Magsaysay
Baguio-Session
Balanga, Bataan
Balayan, Batangas
Bangued, Abra
Batac, Ilocos Norte
Benguet-La Trinidad
Calamba-Real
Calapan
Candon
Cauayan
Dagupan-Fernandez
Dagupan-Perez
Iriga, Camarines Sur
La Union-M.L. Quezon
Laoag-Gen. Segundo
Laoag-Rizal
Lipa-Ayala
Lucena-Red V
Marilao-Bulacan
Occidental Mindoro
Olongapo
Santiago-Main
Solano
Tuguegarao-Luna
Vigan

December 28 (Sun)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Tanauan

December 31 (Wed)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Dagupan-Main
San Carlos-Pangasinan
San Pablo-Maharlika

January 2 (Fri)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Batangas-Main
Batangas-Kumintang Ilaya
Dinalupihan, Bataan
Guagua
Hagonoy, Bulacan
Iba, Zambales
Naga-Gen. Luna
Occidental Mindoro
Palawan
San Miguel, Bulacan
Tanauan

January 3 (Sat)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Aparri
Baguio-Magsaysay
Cauayan
Lemery, Batangas
Lipa-B. Morada
Tabaco
Vigan

VISAYAS

December 26 (Fri)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Ormoc

December 27 (Sat)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Antique
Cebu-Lincoln
Iloilo-Delgado
Roxas

January 2 (Fri)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Bacolod-Araneta
Bacolod-Capitol
Bacolod-Gatuslao
Bacolod-Gonzaga
Bacolod-Lacson
Bacolod-Libertad
Bacolod-North Drive
Bacolod-Singcang
Cebu-Tabunok
Ormoc
Silay

January 3 (Sat)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Bacolod-Sixth
Cebu-Downtown Center
Cebu-Lincoln
Cebu-Taboan

January 4 (Sun)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Roxas-Burgos

MINDANAO

December 26 (Fri)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Cagayan de Oro-Main

December 27 (Sat)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Dipolog-Gen. Luna
Pagadian-Rizal
Pagadian-Sta. Lucia
Zamboanga-Brillantes
Zambonaga-Galleria
Zamboanga-Gov. Lim
Zamboanga-Jaldon
Zamboanga-Veterans

January 2 (Fri)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Cagayan de Oro - Main
Davao-Agdao
Davao-Bajada
Davao-Bankerohan
Davao-Buhangin
Davao-Center
Davao-Doctors
Davao-Ecoland
Davao-Matina
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Davao-Rizal
Davao-Roxas
Davao-San Pedro
Davao-Sta. Ana
Davao-Tagum
Davao-Toril
Digos
Gen. Santos-Makar
Gen. Santos-P. Acharon
Gen. Santos-Pioneer
Gen. Santos-Santiago Blvd.

January 3 (Sat)

9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Basilan
Dipolog-Gen. Luna
Ozamis-Burgos
Ozamis-Rizal
Pagadian-Rizal
Pagadian-Sta. Lucia
Zamboanga-Brillantes
Zamboanga-Galleria
Zamboanga-Gov. Lim
Zamboanga-Jaldon
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Guns fall silent . . .

From page A1

Pentagon kidnapping gang from fleeing the area. The gang has been holding in captivity Norman Sia, 25, a Chinese-Filipino car dealer, who was seized from this city on Dec. 8.

Hundreds of local residents have been displaced anew by the clashes. Most of them have just resettled after being driven away by similar fighting last year.

Yesterday, members of the joint Coordinating Committee on the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) met and agreed to go to the besieged towns and recover the bodies of soldiers killed in the fighting and the four Army men being held captive by MILF guerrillas.

Jaafar said the MILF would be releasing the soldiers to the joint CCCH.

Release of captive soldiers

MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu said the captives—Pfc. Alex Yumag and Privates Neil Lagat, Arnel Demauden and Wilfredo Castillano, all of 7th Infantry Battalion—were "alive and kicking."

"They're in good, safe condition. We want to release them in the presence of the media so they can tell how well they were treated by MILF fighters," he said.

The soldiers were captured following an encounter between their team and a group of MILF rebels in Barangay Gawang in Datu Saudi Ampatuan town on Monday.

To avert further violence, Jaafar said the military and the MILF also agreed to reposition their troops.

Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Narciso Abaya and other top military officials yesterday flew to Mindanao to remind troops to adhere to the suspension of clashes, which threatened to derail the resumption of peace talks scheduled early next year.

As part of the ceasefire agreement, the military will provide safe passage to rebel commanders and members from Talitay, Talayan and Datu Piang.

"This will allow the AFP to go after the kidnap-for-ransom group. The MILF will be given ample time to withdraw in an orderly fashion," said Lt. Col. Daniel Lucero, AFP chief information officer.

Kabalu welcomed the declaration of the moratorium, saying "that's fine with us. We never wanted this to happen... we just exercised our right to self-defense."

Shortly before the ceasefire was announced, Maj. Gen. Generoso Senga of the 6th Infantry Division and Midtimbang agreed "that the MILF vacate the area and allow government troops to run after Talio Tagum," according to Lucero.

Tagum headed the Pentagon group that kidnapped Sia, he said.

Suspicions

The military voiced suspicions that a faction within the MILF that was opposed to the resumption of peace talks was coddling the Pentagon gang.

Kabalu, however, denied that the gang sought refuge in MILF territory in Maguindanao, saying they could be in South Cotabato or Sultan Kudarat.

"They're just using this to justify the attack," he said, referring to military officials.

Complaints

Lt. Col. Julieto Ando, speaking for the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said the military had already filed complaints against the MILF for violation of the year-old truce.

"The complaint of the military to the CCCH has already been discussed. We are the not the ones who violated the existing bilateral truce," Kabalu stressed.

Commenting on the localized ceasefire, Kabalu said their forces had already started complying. "No single fire was heard overnight until today."

Goodwill gestures

Kabalu said that aside from agreeing to a halt in the hostilities, the military also vowed to help facilitate the hospitalization of wounded MILF fighters and the return of displaced civilians.

"These are all gestures of goodwill," Ando confirmed.

But a top-ranking police official yesterday expressed doubts that the ceasefire would hold.

Deputy Director General Virtus Gil, Philippine National Police chief for operations, said he expected more hostilities because the MILF had yet to identify its territories, making it difficult for both the AFP and the PNP to conduct operations in the region.

Define territories

Gil said the confusion over MILF-controlled communities was a key reason behind Monday's fighting.

"The MILF should really define its territories so we'll not be tip-toeing during operations," he said.

Since the government and the rebel group signed last year a joint communique in which both parties agreed to end hostilities and go after criminals in Mindanao, Gil said authorities had been urging the MILF to identify its field commanders and disclose its territories but to no avail.

The MILF, the official claimed, could not fully comply with the agreement owing to the "leadership struggle" within the organization. Because of this conflict, he said authorities were somehow at a loss as to which MILF official they should talk to on this aspect.

Peace talks threatened

Kabalu warned "if fighting continues, it would threaten the peace talks."

But Ms Macapagal, in a statement, insisted that government forces had been conducting a law enforcement operation and had not been targeting the MILF. In the past, the military had accused the MILF of harboring terrorists and other criminals.

"Our troops have been in hot pursuit of members of the Pentagon kidnap gang," Ms Macapagal said.

"The ceasefire committees of both sides are also actively engaged in dialogue, so that potential hostilities will not escalate," she added.

"It proves that the strict enforcement of law and order can be done side by side with the peace process."

Truce monitoring

Formal peace talks, brokered by Malaysia, are expected to resume next month. Garcia said an advance team of Malaysian military observers was expected to arrive in early January to prepare for monitoring the truce.

The government had signed a ceasefire agreement with the 11,900-member MILF in July. *Reports from Edwin O. Fernandez, Charlie C. Señase, Rosa-May V. de Guzman and Julie S. Alipala, PDI Mindanao Bureau; TJ Burgonio and Christian V. Esguerra in Manila; and* INQUIRER *wires*

Palace boys buying 'Otso-otso' for GMA

From page A1

in approval when Bukidnon Rep. Juan Miguel "Migs" Zubiri sang and danced one of her jingles for the presidential campaign.

"*Tayo'y mag* (Let's go for)-PGMA, PGMA, PGMA *na*...," Zubiri sang in front of the President in Malacañang, complete with the hip-swaying moves of the "Otso-otso" song popularized on the ABS-CBN television network.

Zubiri replaced the lyrics with the President's initials. "*Bagay* (It's appropriate)! Gloria Spice Boys," Ms Macapagal said, referring to the group of young congressmen that spearheaded the impeachment of then President Joseph Estrada in 2001.

Zubiri, one of the Spice Boys, said "Team Gloria," the name of the youth movement for Ms Macapagal's campaign, was negotiating with the writer of the "Otso-otso" for the rights to use the tune for Ms Macapagal's campaign jingle.

Zubiri said that aside from its upbeat tune, the song was chosen for its meaning.

Work ethic

"*Otso-otso* means double eight hours, so it shows the President's work ethic. *Todo trabaho* (hardworking)," he said.

The volunteers will have to shell out P500,000 for the rights to use the tune. Popular songs have a steep price, according to Zubiri. He said the money would come "from our pockets." Team Gloria includes young professionals and entrepreneurs, youth leaders and out-of-school youths.

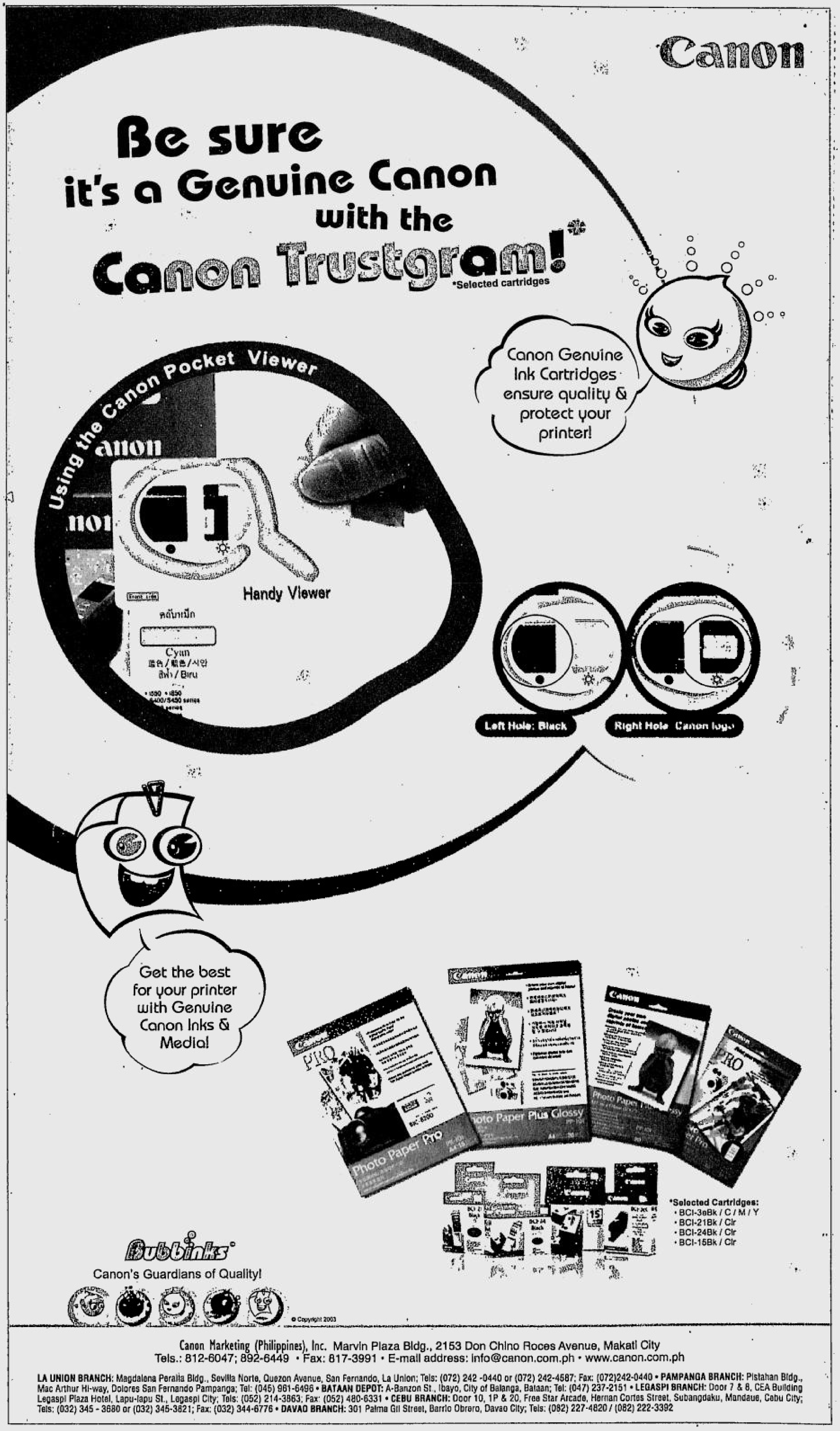
He said another campaign jingle would have the tune of "Bongga Ka 'Day," which has a Visayan flavor.

'Mr. Suave'

Zubiri said Mar Roxas, who quit as trade and industry secretary to run for the Senate, had beaten them to another popular song: "Mr. Suave." He said Roxas had obtained the rights for the song for his campaign jingle.

Zubiri jested that Roxas' jingle would probably go "Mr. Suahe," a kind of shrimp. Roxas also goes by the monicker "Mr. Palengke" because his job as trade secretary often brought him to various marketplaces.

Zubiri coined "2010 *para di bitin* (so it won't hang)" as the slogan for Ms Macapagal's campaign. But he said yesterday that this was thumbed down by the President because "*di bitin*" means snake in the Visayan dialect.



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Gov't shipping execs in more trouble over tanker deal

FOR buying a tanker vessel allegedly without public bidding, a retired general and several other officers of the state-owned PNOC Shipping and Transport Corp. will have to answer an additional count of graft before the Ombudsman.

The allegation was contained in a supplemental complaint affidavit filed by an organization of tanker owners who had earlier filed charges of graft against retired Gen. Cesar F. Tapia, president of the PSTC, for the charter of three tanker vessels allegedly without public bidding.

Peter Aguilar, legal counsel of the Philippine Petroleum Sea Transport Association Inc. (Philpesta) alleged the PSTC inaugurated, launched and registered the vessel, MT General Antonio Luna, with the Maritime Industry Authority (Marina).

Aguilar, in his affidavit, said that since none of Philpesta members were notified of or invited to a bidding for the purchase of the vessel, "it is reasonable to assume and conclude" that no open, fair and transparent public bidding occurred.

Aguilar gave no details on the purchase of the General Antonio Luna except that the tanker had been inaugurated, launched and registered with the Marina under the name of PSTC.

The new allegations were filed after the respondents, which also include Norberto A. Corpuz, chair of the PSTC Tanker Purchase Committee, and several other former officers of PSTC, filed their counter-affidavit to the original complaint.

In the original complaint, the Philpesta had accused the respondents of graft for the charter of three tanker vessels allegedly without proper public bidding.

The three vessels, the MT Felipe Agoncillo, the Andres Bonifacio and the General Miguel Malvar, were chartered from two private companies without proper public bidding, the Philpesta said in its original affidavit.

Tapia and Corpus denied the allegations and described the complaint affidavit as "pure lies, fabrication and unfounded conclusions."

They said complainants had twisted the truth in filing the charges.

Tapia and Corpus denied any part in the charter of the MT Agoncillo and Bonifacio and asserted that time charter of MT Miguel Malvar, through direct negotiated bidding, followed legal procedures and procurement requirements.

The Ombudsman still has to conduct hearings on the charges to determine if there is probably a cause for the filing of graft charges with the Sandiganbayan, the anti-graft court.

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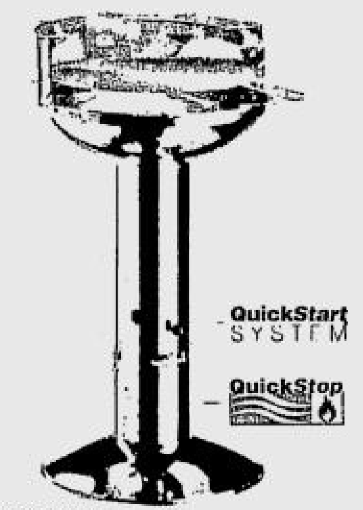

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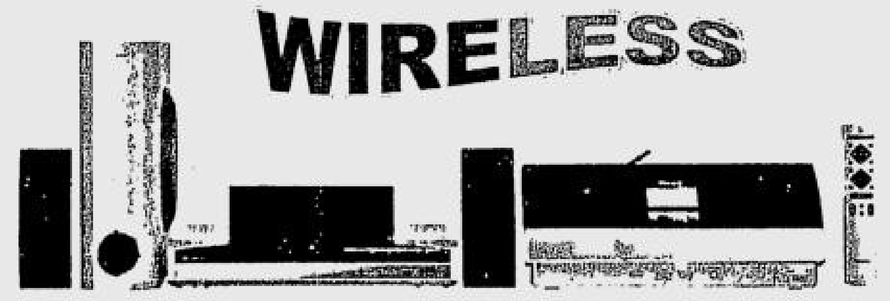

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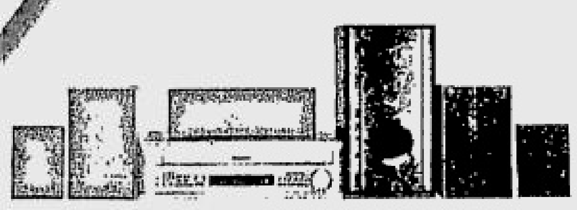

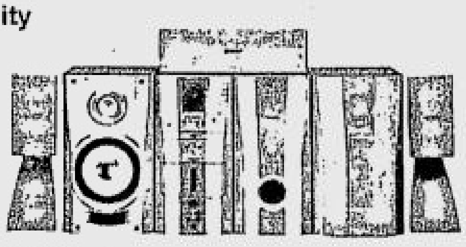

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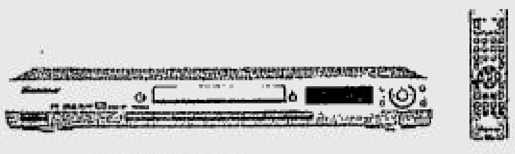

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CSC spies to keep civil servants honest

By Norman Bordadora

FOLLOWING the government's checks on the lifestyles of the country's public officials and employees, the Civil Service Commission yesterday announced an "undercover" plan to make sure civil servants stay efficient and graft-free.

CSC chairperson Karina Constantino-David said the commission would soon field a pool of covert volunteers to act as clients of government offices and take note of officials' and employees' compliance with such service requisites as promptness, good manners and overall competence.

"Be quick and courteous in dealing with clients. For all you know, the client you are catering to may just be a bait out to check and report how well you perform your job," read the CSC announcement of the new performance monitoring initiative.

Dubbed as the Public Service Delivery Audit or Pasada, David said the program would serve both as a monitoring and a feedback mechanism on the manner with which government agencies carry out their official functions.

"The idea is for Pasada volunteers to simulate and empathize with the experiences of the public, good or bad, as they transact business with the government," David said.

"The Pasada program basically aims to increase government operational efficiency to curb corruption and red tape," she added.

David said a pilot phase would be initiated in the national government agencies in Quezon City before the program gears toward full implementation next year in Metro Manila and in the whole country.

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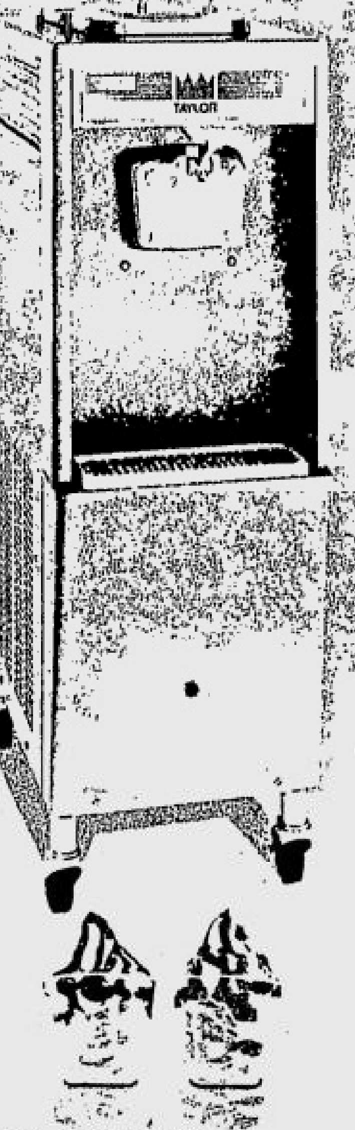

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Bro. Eddie worries GMA

From page A1

afternoon at the residence of her brother Arturo Macapagal in Valle Verde, Pasig City.

Bishop Fred Magbanua, one of the leaders of Task Force Pagbabago, which is spearheading Villanueva's campaign, said Ms Macapagal "in so many words tried to convince Brother Eddie not to run."

Magbanua said Villanueva did not commit anything but "kindly informed" the President that he would discuss her concerns with the members of Task Force Pagbabago. The discussion is scheduled next week, and a rally for Villanueva is set next month, Magbanua said.

Villanueva was accompanied to the meeting—which started at around 3:30 p.m. and lasted until around 8 p.m.—by Bishops Leo Alconga, vice president of the Philippines for Jesus Movement (PJM), and Dave Sobrepeña, president of the Assemblies of God, which has about 3,000 churches in the country.

Collaboration, coalition

De Venecia told reporters that at the meeting between Ms Macapagal, Ramos and himself on one hand and Villanueva, various bishops and born-again leaders on the other, "we decided to find ways and means to collaborate and join our forces."

"[We] made an appeal for the possibility of a coalition with the PJM and the Jesus Is Lord movement led by Bishop Villanueva and several thousand churches of various denominations, and this will be the subject of further conversation," he said.

Asked about Villanueva's response, De Venecia said: "We agreed to talk again and run a survey to be undertaken by them or by us, or jointly, to see how we can develop a common concord on mutual assistance and support for each other."

He said the survey would be conducted to see who would be in the best position to unite the country.

Asked if the survey topnotcher would be the candidate, he said: "No, no, no. We're just trying to develop possible indications of the people's choices, with no agreements for one candidate to move forward and the other to disengage or withdraw."

De Venecia said there was no agreement for Villanueva to withdraw his plan to seek the presidency. The agreement is to hold more consultations "with a view to uniting our forces," he said.

He pointed out that Villanueva planned to run after Ms Macapagal announced last year that she would not run. She reversed this decision in October.

According to De Venecia, Villanueva will discuss the matter with Task Force Pagbabago.

"They will discuss it and pray over it, because these are very learned men, very honorable men of great integrity, and they are not here for concessions," the Speaker said.

"They just want a real, spiritual, moral revolution in the country, and we felt that if their forces and the Lakas-CMD can join together, then by God this is something that the country should be proud of and should cheer."

Remote possibility

Magbanua said in a phone interview that Villanueva would file his certificate of candidacy on Dec. 30.

Asked if Villanueva would back out, he said: "There is always a possibility, but that is very remote."

"The country is clamoring for a righteous leader who is not beholden to the next elections. Too many officials make compromises because of the elections," Magbanua said.

He said public frustration had built up, especially over graft and corruption.

Magbanua, who also chairs the Council of Christian Bishops of the Philippines, said Villanueva's campaign plan was not only nationwide but also international.

Big loss if …

"He is not pressured at all," Magbanua said. "It is the [administration] that is worried because we are a big voting bloc. If they lose Brother Eddie's bloc, it would be a big loss for them."

Magbanua also said that during the meeting, Ms Macapagal, Ramos and De Venecia discussed with Villanueva how to unite for the 2004 polls.

"It is a good sign for us," he said, adding that Villanueva's chances would grow if Sen. Noli de Castro decides to run for president and splits the masses' vote.

5 million

Magbanua said the JIL had five million "constituency members" (not 7 million, as earlier reported) and 35 centers in key cities worldwide with big Filipino populations.

The Commission on Elections is set to implement absentee voting among registered Filipinos abroad for the first time next year.

Presidential aspirant Raul Roco said he welcomed Villanueva's planned run but doubted the ability of the JIL to deliver the necessary votes.

"I welcome all candidates," Roco said in a forum at the Sitio Fernandina in San Juan, adding that it was everybody's democratic right to seek an elective post.

Asked if he believed that a so-called "born-again Christian bloc" existed, he said: "It's not a question of belief. [Its existence] must be demonstrated."

Roco, who is also set to file his certificate of candidacy on Dec. 30, said he would consider Villanueva a challenge, just like every other contender.

Prayer for unity

De Venecia said Villanueva and other JIL leaders prayed over Ms Macapagal during the meeting that he described as "very constructive" and "very cordial."

He said the prayer was for "unity, reconciliation and moral revolution in the country."

"I was very happy with that. I've never been [as] happy with a meeting like that because it was all constructive discussion," he said.

De Venecia also said Villanueva "helped" Ramos in 1992 and himself in 1998, and "helped Gloria propel her ascent to the presidency."

"So the three of us are indebted to the JIL movement and to Bishop Villanueva," he said, adding:

"It was a meeting of old friends and we exchanged notes. But the most important is that our constituents, our forces, are agreed that these two—the President and Bishop Villanueva—are highly moral leaders, and we want them uniting together instead of competing for the same post."

Thumbs down

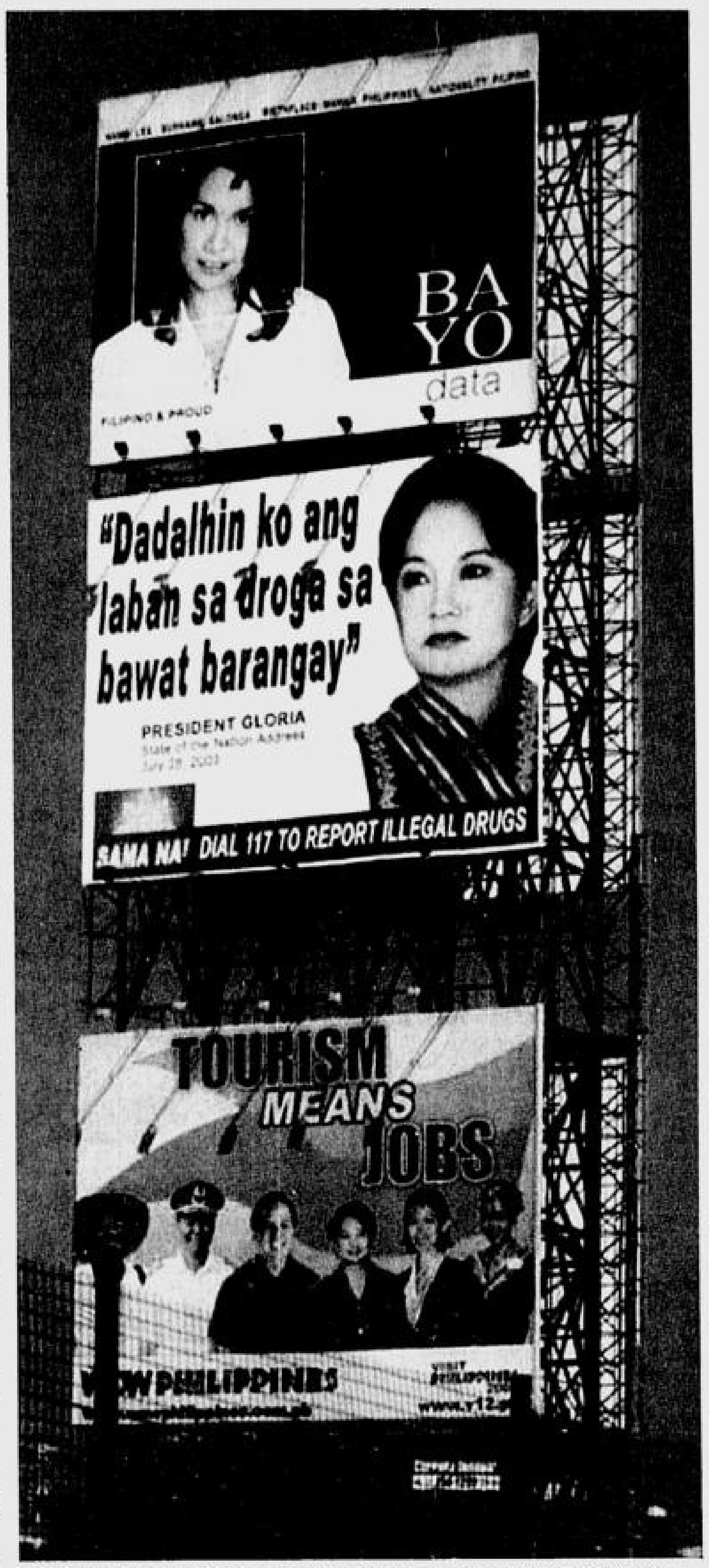
But Crispin Beltran, former Bayan Muna representative and now chair for electoral reforms of the political party Anakpawis, said Villanueva's announcement of his planned candidacy was the "least subtle" and "most blatant" withdrawal of support from the President by a group that had been her longtime ally.

In a statement, Beltran said the JIL "exercised greatest tact by not denouncing the President and announcing their withdrawal of support."

"But by fielding their own presidential nominee, the JIL has in fact snubbed the President and thumbed down her candidacy," he added.

Beltran also said it was highly probable that other religious groups would abandon Ms Macapagal before the campaign period starts.

He said Ms Macapagal had "failed miserably to make good on her promises to alleviate the people's poverty and clean the government of graft and corruption." *With reports from Luige del Puerto and Norman Bordadora*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RIGHT up there with Lea Salonga, those super posters advertising the President's tourism and anti-drugs campaign at the South Superhighway are mere signs of bigger things to come. ROGER MARGALLO

Ople called a demigod, prophet, enigma

From page A1

ble town of Hagonoy (in Bulacan) could also produce a prophet for the country," he said.

Pimentel said Ople was a "prophet who told our people with equal credibility that the salvific vision of the country lurks up there beyond the clouds when the muse of eloquence overwhelmed him, or that the roadmap to our redemption as a people lies here in our midst when the muse of pragmatism took over his being."

Self-taught

Pimentel Ople's enviable success to his having been an unrelenting autodidact (self-taught).

"Largely self-taught, Ka Blas had acquired a broad insight into the workings of the human mind that lasted him well and guaranteed that in the political wrangling and maneuverings that he had to go through, he would come out on top," he said.

Pimentel said Ople, a graduate of the Hagonoy Institute, scaled the heights of politics before, during and after martial law and stayed in the corridors of power up to his last breath.

He said Ople seemed not to care about the weakening of his body. "The problem is not because his flesh was weak; but his spirit was so strong."

Life well-spent

In his eulogy, Tatad said Ople pursued what Martin Luther King called "the riches of freedom and the security of justice."

"At 16, he was already out in the hills fighting a foreign foe. He died trying to help get the disabled ship of State to a safer port. Nobody ever always gets it right. But whether as a journalist, senator or Cabinet member, and even with an imperfect aim, he tried to give it his best shot," Tatad said.

With all its imperfections, it was a life well-spent, according to Tatad.

"Ople had devoted his life to a ceaseless search for meaning, and I'm sure he had found it," said Tatad, who served as the information secretary while Ople was the labor secretary during the Marcos regime.

"Perhaps the following lines from T.S. Elliot's 'Little Gidding' convey a little more clearly what I am saying: 'We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started. And know the place for the first time.'"

Traveling light

Tatad said that although "his search for meaning" took him to distant shores, "these long travels must have taught him the beauty of traveling light, and because he had learned to do so, he could now get to God faster."

For his part, Herrera said: "The stars are not wanted now, put out everyone. Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun. Pour out the ocean and sweep up the wood. For nothing now can ever come to any good."

He described Ople as "phenomenon in Philippine society," and went on to call him a "demigod in the labor movement."

"But more than anything, Ka Blas was someone far more important: he was my friend—my dearest, most trusted and most loyal friend. And in the world of politics, where friendship, trust and loyalty are negotiable commodities, he was one of the few true friends I've ever had," said Herrera, head of the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines.

He said Ople was a "man who did not tiptoe through life; he strode through it."

Batman and Robin

Before his oration ended, Herrera said he wished he could say, "Let's have coffee" one more time. Herrera titled his eulogy, "Batman and Robin," in reference to his and Ople's regular press briefings with the Senate media every Friday when they were still senators.

Beyond words

Senate President Franklin Drilon and Senators Loren Legarda, Vicente Sotto III and Edgardo Angara also delivered eulogies for Ople.

Drilon captured the atmosphere in the session hall when he said that "Our sorrow is beyond words."

Drilon took pains to enumerate the feats accomplished by Ople, and proceeded to pay tribute to a "great statesman," who, he said, had raised the status of the country in the community of nations.

"Whatever role he played in his lifetime, Ka Blas certainly was a veritable trailblazer and unflinching in his dedication to the nation and the Filipino people. Yes, indeed, for he passed away with his boots on in the service of the Filipino nation," said Drilon.

Legarda, for her part, described him as a "giving, selfless person (who) always had a stand or position on issues, courageous and a true advocate at heart. He was one of the main influences in my life, and I shall always strive to emulate his good example."

She broke into tears when she said that Ople, who was like a father to her in the Senate, would live on through his writings and accomplishments.

Statesman for all

On behalf of the Ople family, lawyer Dalisay Ople-San Jose thanked the six who delivered eulogies for the late senator, and all those who condoled with them, including the Senate press corps.

Calling Ople "Amang," San Jose said her family "value your love for your Ka Blas." She urged senators to "carry on his work and vision of being a statesman for all people."

San Jose received a copy of a Senate resolution expressing the chamber's "profound sympathy and condolence" to the Ople family. The resolution, introduced by Drilon, Legarda and Sotto, recognized Ople's stature as a statesman and a "gentleman in the highest order."

Necrological services

The two-hour necrological rites were attended by Ople's wife Susan and their seven children, 17 senators, former Senators Freddie Webb, Wigberto Tañada and Eva Estrada-Kalaw, Ople's friends and relatives in politics and the media, among others.

From the Senate, Ople's remains were brought to the Mabini Hall of the Department of Foreign Affairs, which he christened in December last year to honor Apolinario Mabini, who was prime minister and concurrent foreign affairs secretary under the First Republic.

A series of necrological services would be held until this morning, after which Ople's remains will be brought to his hometown. *With a report from Jerome Aning*

'FPJ, Ping run won't divide opposition'

From page A1

son's possible run for president against Poe would take the votes away from the opposition.

Cracks showing

"Because I think the opposition votes would go to the united opposition's official candidate," he stressed, adding that Lacson's own supporters would end up in the camp of Poe, whom he described as the official candidate of the united opposition.

He predicted that by the middle of the presidential race, "you'll see the start of the consolidation behind the official opposition candidate."

But the LDP itself is showing cracks, with Palawan Rep. Abraham Mitra and Muntinlupa Rep. Rozzano Rufino Biazon filing an indefinite leave of absence from the party, supposedly to protest Angara's leadership style.

At a joint press briefing, Biazon and Mitra said they both felt isolated as a result of party intramurals.

The two congressmen are identified with the LDP faction pushing for the candidacy of Lacson, a party member.

Unenthusiastic

At the Senate necrological rites for Foreign Secretary Blas Ople, Lacson told reporters that he was still open to another meeting with Poe, but only until Dec. 29.

"If we don't talk on Dec. 29—the date when both he and I plan to file our candidacy—then I'll go ahead," Lacson said.

The senator said he was "not enthusiastic anymore" about meeting with Poe "because of what happened" Tuesday when Poe announced at a forum in Club Filipino that he was not withdrawing from the presidential race.

Poe's backers also said the movie actor planned to file his candidacy also on Dec. 29—an indication, according to Angara, that the latter was determined to run for president even if he meets with Lacson this week.

Lacson acknowledged to reporters that Poe apparently had a "change of heart" after meeting with Angara and Senate Minority Leader Vicente Sotto III the other night.

POE

The senator said that at his last meeting with Poe last weekend, both of them clearly agreed to undergo a fair selection process.

Campaign mode

"[If there is no] selection process, there's no choice. We go our separate ways," Lacson said.

Poe is now on "campaign mode," and his scheduled meeting with Lacson is not expected to change his decision to go for the presidency, Angara told reporters.

"I think nothing they may discuss or agree upon in their private meeting would alter that decision," he said, adding:

"Why will you go on a campaign mode if you are still open to some suggestion?"

Lacson said that if he and Poe get to meet, he would ask the actor what the agenda of their meeting would be.

"If there is no selection process to discuss, then there is nothing to discuss," he said in Taglish.

Weak leadership

According to Congressman Mitra, the LDP has lost a lot of good politicians as a result of Angara's weak leadership. Among them, he said, was Foreign Secretary Blas Ople and Sen. Neptali Gonzales, both deceased, and Sen. Rodolfo Biazon and Cagayan de Oro Rep. Constantino Jaraulla.

"For a month, I tried my best to speak my mind, but it already reached the point that I have to go on leave so as not to damage the party and make a statement to Angara," Mitra said.

Angara earlier removed Mitra as LDP provincial chair in Palawan, as well as Iloilo Rep. Rolex Suplico, party chair in Western Visayas.

Mitra lamented that Angara had not spoken with him or any other member of his group, and had not invited them to any LDP meeting or activity.

Biazon said he was happy that Poe and Lacson were finally talking things out to determine who between them should give way to the other.

He said his father, Senator Biazon, did not leave the LDP but was merely on indefinite leave and decided to coalesce alone with Raul Roco, another presidential aspirant.

Asked if taking an indefinite leave of absence would mean leaving the party soon, Biazon said that if he could help it, he did not want to leave the LDP. But it may also be part of the process of eventually leaving the party, he said.

Biazon said he could not understand why Angara could not support Lacson's bid for the presidency and had to look for an outsider.

"When [Nationalist People's Coalition chair] Eduardo Cojuangco backed off, Angara chose another in the person of Fernando Poe. So to us, it's not just a personality clash with Lacson. It's something else," Biazon said.

Taken for granted

Both Biazon and Mitra decried the absence of a selection process for the party's standard-bearer.

Biazon said he joined the LDP full of idealism, especially when Angara described it as "a party of the future."

"I'm puzzled why it's turning out this way," he said.

The two congressmen also lamented the party leadership's supposed lack of concern for members.

"For the past 10 years, Angara used the party for his own interests," Biazon said. "I'm just a small fry in the LDP, but I feel that I'm also being taken for granted."

Make way, here come Roco's angels

From page A1

from Quezon City, who started Roco's Angels along with Yolanda Yadao in February.

Slowly Valiente and Yadao convinced others to join their movement. "It just mushroomed," Valiente said.

She said the group agreed to pray for "unity, peace and for God to give favor to Raul Roco to become a great president."

They even made their own prayer for Roco, which they read at 6 a.m. and at 6 p.m. every day wherever they may be.

But some "angels" who could not wake up at 6 a.m., pray instead at 8 a.m. and at 8 p.m. Others pray at different times of the day, "as long as it's twice a day," Valiente said. "They can pray any manner they want as long as the intention is there."

FVR people

Although they are not called Roco's Angels, personalities identified with former President Fidel Ramos have joined the camp of Roco.

An aide of Roco confirmed that Cristy Ramos-Jalasco and Leticia Shahani, daughter and sister of the former President respectively, were supporting Roco's campaign.

Ramos-Jalasco has yet to accept Roco's invitation for her to join the senatorial slate, "but she told us that he would support Senator Roco whether or not she would run for senator," Roco's aide said.

The aide said Shahani had been joining the meetings of the Reform Oriented Citizens Organization, a group formed early this year by congressmen belonging to the 8th Congress to support Roco in the May elections.

Almonte

Reports have it that another Ramos point man, retired general Jose "Joe" Almonte, is working quietly to help form the political machinery to carry Roco to victory in the 2004 polls. But the aide was mum over this, saying he was not at liberty to say so.

Roco's angels come from different walks of life, men and women of various ages. "Even a seven-year-old kid can be a Roco's angel as long as she can pray," Valiente said.

Roco's Angels have chapters in Pasig, Pasay, Manila, Quezon City and Bulacan. "We're expanding without me knowing it," she said.

Valiente first volunteered for Roco in 1992, when he ran for senator. She said she did not know Roco and his family personally then, but just liked what she saw and read about his track record.

ROCO

Entire family

By 1998, her entire family became actively involved in Roco's presidential campaign. Valiente's youngest daughter Marjorie, 25, became a volunteer in 1997.

Valiente said the group came up with the name Roco's Angels by accident. She recalled another Roco supporter Ed Olaguer commenting that the volunteers were like angels of Roco because they help him without him knowing it.

So they had their name. "This is how we help him and there's no connection to the political aspect of the campaign," she said.

No sliding down

At his Aksyon Demokratiko party headquarters in Ortigas, Roco yesterday accused Malacañang of making it appear he had agreed to be President Macapagal-Arroyo's running mate.

"Absolutely I will not step down," Roco told reporters.

He refuted news reports that came out Wednesday quoting an unnamed source saying that former president Corazon Aquino wanted him to team up with Ms Macapagal.

"There's no basis to that story. The last time I saw her she was saying she'll stay out of politics this time and she will not support nor induce support for anybody in particular… I believe her," Roco said.

"So it's very clear to us that's (black) propaganda (to force me) to slide down," he added.

Roco said it should be the President who should slide down to vice president or bow out of the race completely.

"They keep on trying to lessen our popularity, but the people have decided… There's no question that the Filipino people have already made up their minds to change government, " he said.

Malacañang is wooing Roco to slide down as Ms Macapagal's running mate.

Officials believe such team-up will consolidate the votes of the Edsa II forces and bolster their chances against the opposition's standard bearer, who could be either action star Fernando Poe Jr. or Sen. Panfilo Lacson.

Courtship

On Dec. 8, Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo reportedly broached the idea to his predecessor and Roco's ally, Rene de Villa during a meeting at the residence of Senate President and new Liberal Party chair Franklin Drilon.

In October, Roco disclosed that some representatives of the President went to see him to ask him to run as her running mate instead.

On both occasions, Roco's camp rejected Malacañang's plea. An aide of Roco said Malacañang officials have conveyed their worry that the hugely popular Poe, best friend of deposed president Joseph Estrada, would win unless Ms Macapagal and Roco join forces.

No logic

"But there's no logic in that," said the aide. Even if Roco slides down, his votes would not automatically go to the President, the aide said.

Roco is expected to announce his senatorial line-up on Dec. 21. During the oath-taking of new Aksyon members yesterday, Roco introduced athlete Bong Coo and former securities chief Perfecto Yasay Jr. as part of his slate.

Earlier, he said among those sure to be included in his lineup were Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, who bolted the opposition Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino, former Solicitor General Frank Chavez and lawyer Mel "Batas" Mauricio.

With a report from Michael Lim Ubac

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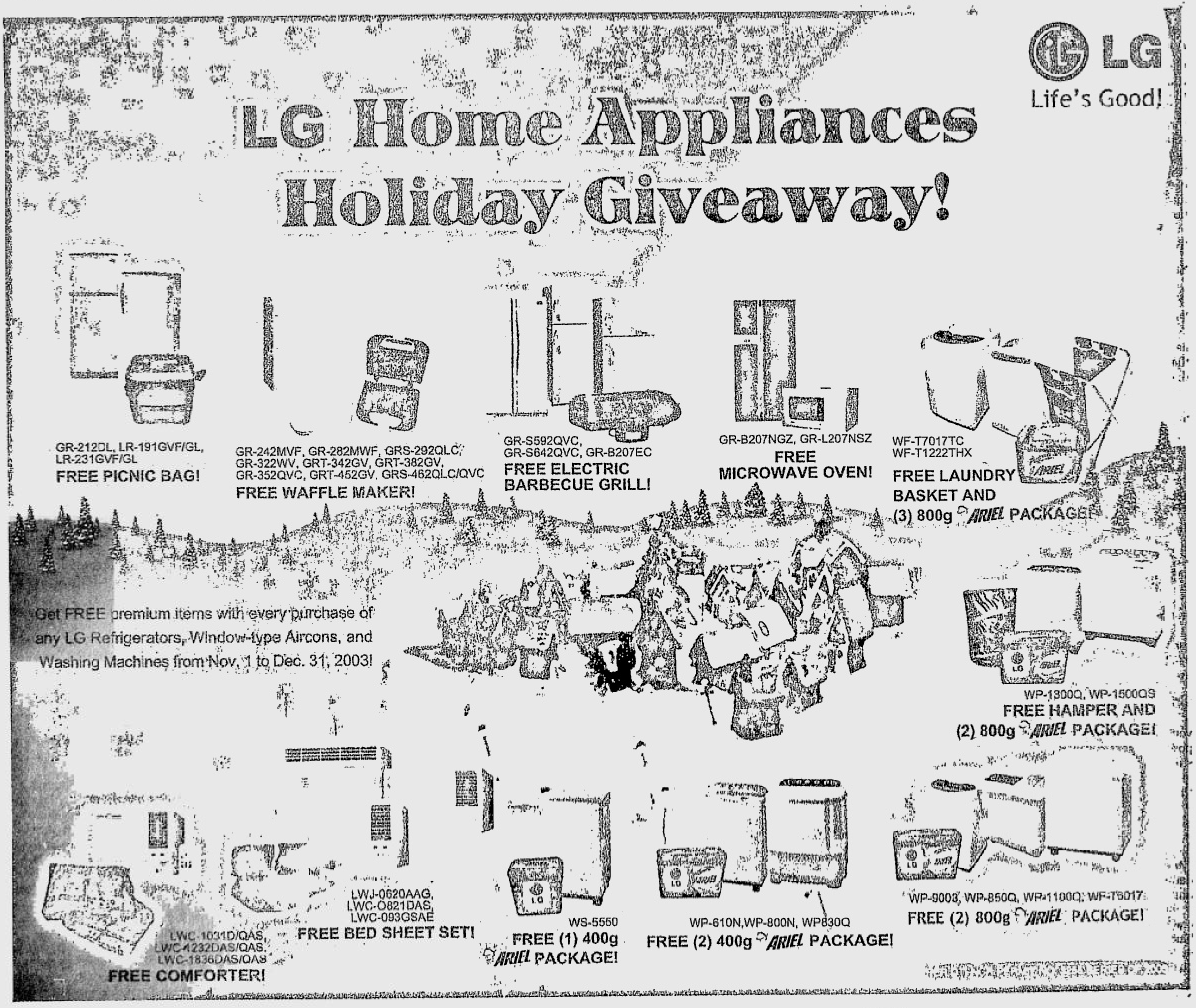
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The WORLD

Editor **Luverne B. Gueco**

Truck bomb blast kills 10 in Iraq

BAGHDAD—An explosives-laden truck speeding toward a police station collided with a bus at an intersection before dawn Wednesday, killing at least 10 people amid a surge of violence since the weekend arrest of Saddam Hussein.

Twenty people were also injured in the attack in al-Bayaa, a poor district in southwest Baghdad, hospital officials said. Ahmed Kadhim Ibrahim, deputy interior minister, said the dead were Iraqis, and that the truck driver had planned to strike the police station.

The charred, crumpled bus lay in the intersection after the blast. Body parts were scattered in the area. A pink plastic shoe sandal lay in the street. Two cars nearby were destroyed. US soldiers arrived and took photographs of the shattered remains of the truck.

"I was leaving home when I heard an explosion and saw cars burning at al-Bayaa intersection," said Ahmed Ayyoub, a 23-year bus driver.

"I ran to the place to see if there were people injured. There were lots of human remains on the sidewalks and we started collecting them," he said. The rescue effort was more difficult because it was still dark at the time of the blast, he said.

Suicide bombers have frequently targeted Iraqi police stations in strikes at what they view as collaborators with the US-led occupation authorities. The coalition scored a major victory over the weekend with the capture of Saddam Hussein.

Assailants have previously attacked the al-Bayaa station several times. Four days ago, police said, attackers fired rocket-propelled grenades at the station. US soldiers staying at the station left the station after that attack at the request of Iraqi police who believed their presence was provoking attacks.

Medhat Ghanem, 32, said he was on the sidewalk waiting for a bus when he saw a yellow truck speed down the main road and explode.

"After the explosion, I fell to the ground and was unconscious for a bit. Then I found that my leg was broken," Ghanem said in a hospital where his leg was put in a cast.

Ibrahim blamed the bombing on Saddam's supporters.

"They were trying to avenge the cowardly leader, who they saw as a hero in the past," Ibrahim said.

The explosion followed riots in Baghdad by Saddam loyalists, who also ambushed a US patrol in Samarra, stormed the office of a US-backed mayor in Fallujah and battled American troops in Ramadi as cities in Iraq's "Sunni Triangle" region seethed over the ex-dictator's capture.

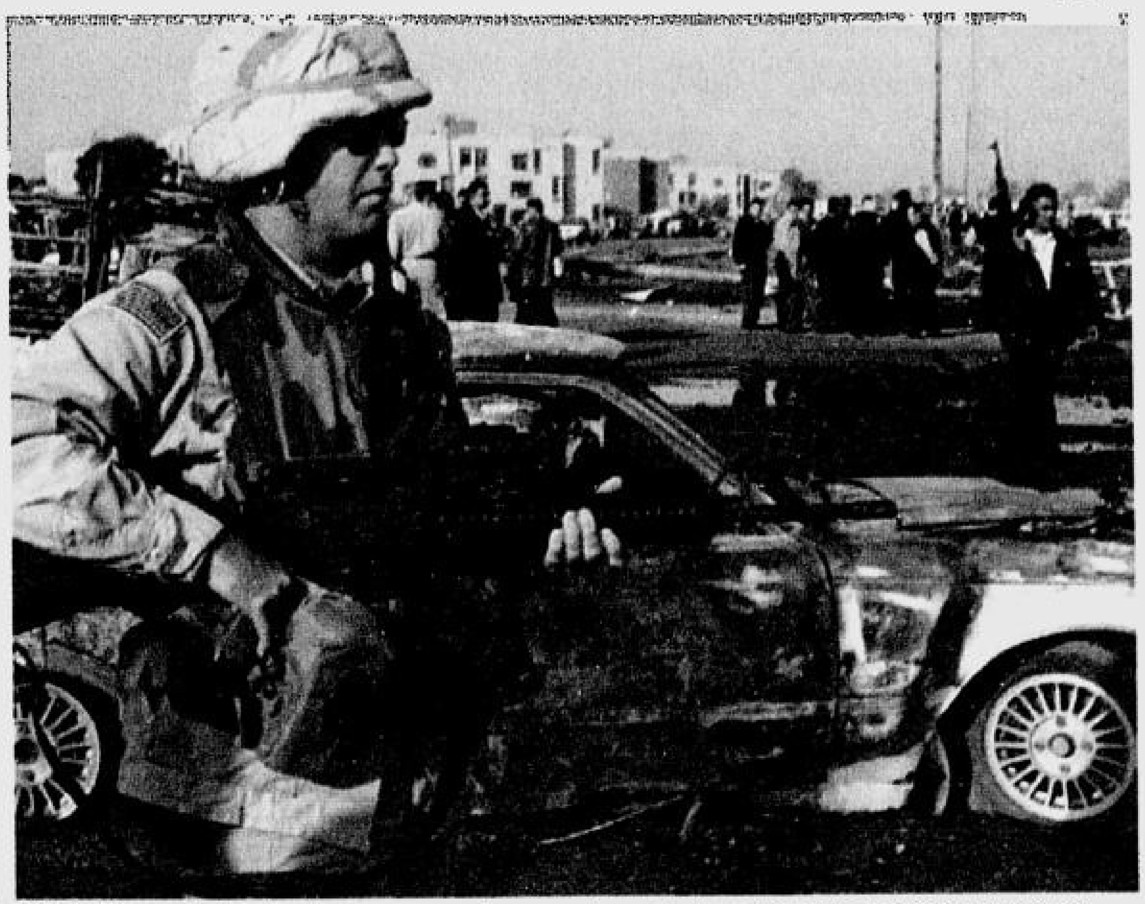
At least four people were injured at a pro-Saddam demonstration in the northern city of Mosul on Wednesday, witnesses said. They said passengers in a car opened fire on the protesters.

As soldiers fought off angry protesters and guerrilla attacks on Monday night and Tuesday, the 4th Infantry Division said it had snared a leader of the insurgency and 78 other people in a raid north of Baghdad, not far from where Saddam was captured three days earlier.

A roadside bomb wounded three American soldiers in Saddam's hometown of Tikrit, and a pro-Saddam demonstration on Tuesday in Mosul ended in violence, with a policeman killed and a second injured.

The chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Richard Myers, said in Baghdad on Tuesday that military planners were preparing for American troops to stay in Iraq for up to two more years despite capturing the former Iraqi leader.

The 4th Infantry Division's raid in the village of Abu Safa, near Samarra and about 100 km north of Baghdad, began late Monday after insurgents in Samarra ambushed US forces. The US military said its troops killed 11 of the attackers, who released a flock of pigeons to signal one another that the American patrol was in range. No Americans were hurt. *AP*



A US soldier and an Iraqi policeman secure the area where a tanker truck exploded killing at least 10 people and wounding a dozen southwest of Baghdad on Dec. 17. AFP

Shiites split on Saddam punishment

KARBALA, Iraq—Clerics and residents of this Shiite holy city that faced a bloody crackdown by Saddam Hussein's forces more than a decade ago were divided. Some wanted their former leader to be executed, some wanted him to be tortured to death and others said he should be put in a cage so people could spit on him.

Fadhel Abed Attiyah, who owns a small bookshop in Karbala, covered the window of his shop with newspapers carrying pictures of a bearded Saddam shortly after his capture on Saturday. "There he is. Look at the dog. Look at this donkey," Attiyah told people stopping by to take a look on Tuesday.

"I am very happy with what happened to Saddam. This man destroyed our future, but my wound will never heal until I see him hanged," said Attiyah, whose cousin was executed after the 1991 Shiite uprising against the former Iraqi dictator.

Shiites, who make up 60 percent of Iraq's 25 million people, were oppressed for decades by Saddam, who favored his fellow Sunnis, awarding them most senior posts in the state. One of Saddam's worst crackdowns on Shiites came in March 1991 when they rose up against his regime following the end of the Gulf War a month earlier. Thousands of Shiites, who were killed in several weeks of fighting, were found in dozens of mass graves.

Since Saddam's capture by US troops, people in some predominantly Sunni towns north and west of Baghdad have held protests and fought with Iraqi police and American forces.

Saddam killed many Shiite clerics, including several of their leaders. In 1980, senior cleric Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr was executed. Nineteen years later, Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, another top cleric, was assassinated in the holy city of Najaf by suspected Saddam agents. The two senior clerics were not related.

Muwaffak al-Rabii, a member of Iraq's interim Governing Council who met Saddam a day after his capture, said the former Iraqi leader ridiculed him and three of his colleagues when they met him at an undisclosed location and asked about the killing of the two al-Sadr clerics. *AP*

Saddam deserves death, says Bush

WASHINGTON—Saddam Hussein deserves the "ultimate penalty" for his crimes, said President George W. Bush, putting the United States sharply at odds with Europe, the United Nations and nations that adamantly oppose the death penalty.

A day after saying his own views about Saddam's fate were unimportant, Bush decided to step forward and publicly state his opinion, a position that could carry considerable influence in determining the punishment of the deposed Iraqi leader. The US government blames Saddam for the killings of 300,000 people.

"Let's just see what penalty he gets, but I think he ought to receive the ultimate penalty... for what he has done to his people," Bush said Tuesday. "I mean, he is a torturer, a murderer, they had rape rooms. This is a disgusting tyrant who deserves justice, the ultimate justice."

Bush made his comments in an interview with ABC News. The TV network released a transcript of the remarks.

Even while expressing his views, Bush said Saddam's punishment "will be decided not by the president of the United States but by the citizens of Iraq in one form or another."

He said he didn't see a need for an American role in Saddam's trial that, according to him, was a process that Iraqis were "plenty capable of conducting."

The president distanced himself from possible interrogation methods used to elicit information from Saddam, other than to say that "this country doesn't torture."

Bush also defended the intelligence that he used in citing weapons of mass destruction in Iraq as a main reason for going to war. *AP*

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America's Asian allies step up plans to deploy troops in Iraq

SEOUL—With Saddam Hussein behind bars, Asian governments are increasingly optimistic for peace in Iraq and stepping up plans to send troops in support of the US-led reconstruction.

South Korea finalized plans on Wednesday to send 3,000 troops, while a team of military officials from Seoul left for Washington to discuss when and where they should be dispatched.

Japan plans to send its first main troop contingent in late February after months of delay, a major Japanese newspaper reported Wednesday. And Thailand will keep hundreds of its troops in Iraq with hopes that security will improve following Saturday's capture of Saddam by US soldiers, reports there said.

The emboldened military plans among Washington's allies underline the growing sense of optimism for Iraq since Saddam was dragged from his underground lair, despite the official wariness voiced by many leaders.

"It is hard to judge how the security situation will change short term," South Korean Defense Minister Cho Young-kil said Wednesday while announcing South Korea's dispatch. "But in the long term, I believe the resistance will falter and weaken in the absence of their leader."

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun and Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi have defended troop dispatches as a duty to both their top ally, the United States, and to regional stability in the Middle East.

But sending troops is deeply unpopular with the public in both countries. And the plans have drawn further criticism since late last month when Japanese diplomats and South Korean reconstruction engineers were killed in separate gun attacks amid spiraling violence in Iraq.

Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai said earlier that 422 Thai troops on humanitarian duties in Iraq might have to be withdrawn if the violence against coalition forces continued.

But after Saddam's capture, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra predicted a new era of opportunity for Iraqi reconstruction and confirmed his nation's humanitarian mission would continue until its one-year agreement with the United States ends next year.

"International efforts to rehabilitate and reconstruct Iraq can, from now on, be accelerated," he was quoted as saying Monday by the Thai News Agency. "I believe that the world situation will improve... after the arrest of the former Iraqi leader, especially the situation in war-torn Iraq."

In Japan, Koizumi's Cabinet had already approved a basic blueprint to send 1,000 military personnel to southern Iraq for recon struction work and other non-combat duties. *AP*

Children of jailed extremists undergo training in terrorism

KUALA LUMPUR—Anticipating their own capture or death, Southeast Asian Islamic extremists sent their sons to Pakistan for training in how to attack Western targets so they could take over as the next generation of terrorist leaders, The Associated Press has learned.

In a crackdown on the practice, five Malaysian students, including four teenagers, have been jailed without trial here following raids on Islamic boarding schools in Karachi, which had sent them on field trips to get first-hand experience of Islamic militant operations.

The students underwent weapons and explosives training in Afghanistan and Kashmir, and some met al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden before the US-led Afghan war started in late 2001, Malaysian police said.

Three of the five students are the sons of members of an alleged Malaysian cell of Jemaah Islamiyah—the al-Qaida-linked terror network operating throughout Southeast Asia—who were jailed two years ago. A fourth is the brother of a jailed militant suspect.

Hambali, once operations chief for Jemaah Islamiyah, arranged for some of his students to get Pakistan-based training, a senior Malaysian government official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. Hambali has been in US custody since August, but ran an Islamic school in Malaysia for years before going on the run shortly before the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States.

His plan was to train future Jemaah Islamiyah leaders, with the students returning home by 2006 to take up jihad, or holy war, said another Malaysian official, also speaking privately.

Hambali, whose real name is Riduan Isamuddin, arranged in 1999 and 2000 for the students to attend Karachi's Abu Bakar Islamic University, paying for at least two students to get there. *AP*

Taiwan scientist tests positive for SARS

TAIPEI—A medical researcher has tested positive for SARS—Taiwan's first case since the island was dropped from a global list of infected areas last July, health officials said Wednesday.

The patient was a 44-year-old senior scientist who has been studying SARS at the National Defense University in Taipei, Taiwan's Center for Disease Control said in a statement.

"Right now, he's the only one who's been infected," Health Minister Chen Chien-jen said at a news conference.

It's the second time a researcher has caught the disease by studying SARS samples in recent months. Singapore reported a similar case in August.

The Taiwanese researcher, who lives in suburban Taipei, came down with SARS after attending a conference in Singapore, but officials said they thought he was exposed to the virus in his lab, as early as Dec. 5, and not in Singapore.

The scientist traveled to the city-state on Dec. 7 and returned to Taiwan on a China Airlines flight on Dec. 10, the CDC said. He showed no signs of a fever when his temperature was checked at Taipei's airport in the afternoon, the center said, but he became sick later that evening.

The CDC said a World Health Organization-approved PCR, or polymerase chain reaction test, was used to confirm the SARS case. A PCR detects the genetic material of the virus.

Chen doubted that the scientist was a threat to the public, including his fellow plane passengers during his return trip. The health official said SARS wasn't considered contagious until the onset of a fever. The virus has a maximum incubation period of 10 days, according to the World Health Organization.

Chen said that since the scientist was not in the official contagious period during his travels, passengers on the China Airlines flight would not be individually informed about the case. But he urged the passengers to be vigilant for SARS symptoms.

A CDC spokesperson, Shih Wen-yi, said Taiwan's military hadn't authorized the CDC to provide details about the Singapore visit.

In Singapore, Karen Tan, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Health, said Wednesday there were no suspected SARS cases in the city-state.

Since becoming sick, the researcher has quarantined himself at home, and there seemed to be little risk of infecting the public, Chen said.

"People should not fear SARS spreading," he said.

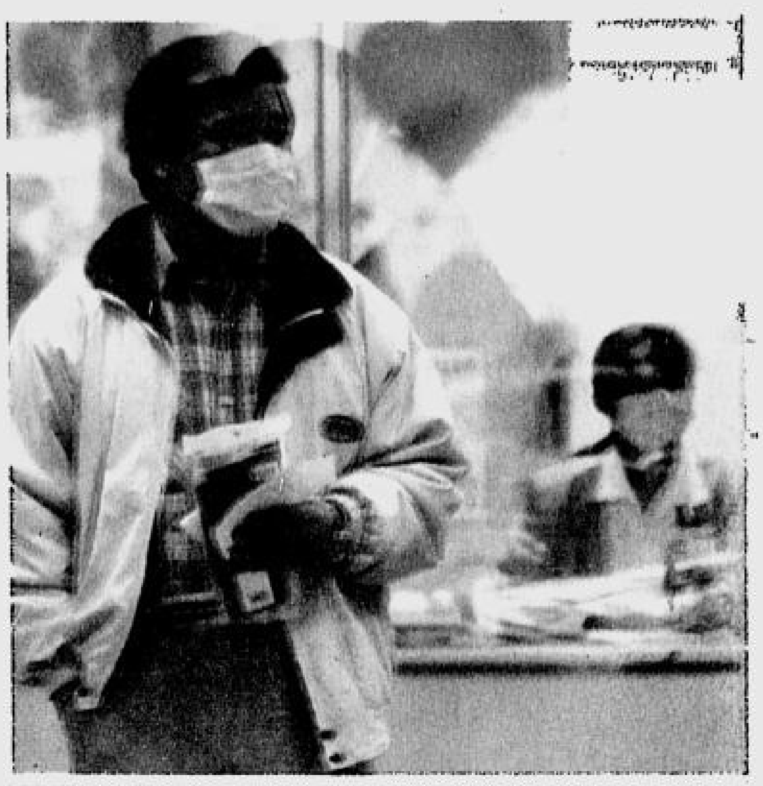
One positive sign was that since the researcher developed a fever on Dec. 10, none of his relatives or colleagues has developed SARS symptoms, Chen said.

But the man's wife, two children and father have been quarantined at home. Six colleagues who went to Singapore with the researcher have also been quarantined at home.

All Taiwanese labs researching SARS have been closed, CDC chief Su Ih-jen said.

The infected scientist worked at the Institute of Preventative Medicine, sponsored by the National Science Council.

The SARS case caused Taiwan's jittery stock market to drop 2.3 percent. But Nicholas Chai, a manager at Insight Pacific Research, said investors stopped panicking after learning the case involved a laboratory researcher. *AP*



MASKS are back in Taipei after Taiwan reported its first SARS case since July. AP

WORLDBRIEFS

Barred from Bethlehem

JERUSALEM—Israel on Tuesday barred Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem for a third straight year, as Egyptian mediators once more pressed reluctant Palestinian militants to halt attacks on Israel. With efforts to revive peace talks at a standstill, Israeli leaders sent a mixed message to the Palestinians: Israel is ready to negotiate but will take unilateral action if peace talks fail. *AP*

Atrocities in Aceh

JAKARTA—The Indonesian military is pursuing a campaign of killings, kidnappings and beatings of civilians in Aceh province where they are hunting down separatist rebels, an international rights group said Wednesday. Acehnese refugees interviewed in Malaysia said Indonesian security forces were guilty of gross human rights abuses, including extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, beatings and arbitrary arrests, Human Rights Watch said in a report released Wednesday. *AFP*

Hospital murder case

NEWARK, New Jersey—A former nurse who claims to have killed as many as 40 patients over the past 16 years was fired from at least two hospitals and was even the subject of a murder investigation. But Charles Cullen kept managing to land another job. Authorities say the case underscores serious flaws in a system in which hospitals report only limited information about nurses to other prospective employers for fear they might be sued. A severe nursing shortage may have also played a part. *AP*

Long silence explained

COLUMBIA, South Carolina—The woman born out of wedlock to the late Sen. Strom Thurmond and a black maid nearly eight decades ago said she kept silent about her roots until now because she cared for her segregationist father and didn't want to hurt his career. In an interview to be aired on television news show "60 Minutes II" on Wednesday, Essie Mae Washington-Williams said she liked her father even if they saw each other only about once a year. "But I knew that he cared about me. He was very good to me. I would not have done anything to hurt him," the 78-year-old retiree said Tuesday. *AP*

Date rape detector

SINGAPORE—A credit card-sized detector to test if drinks have been spiked with the "date rape" drug is available in Singapore and will be marketed to party-going students, media reports said Wednesday. Drink Spike Detector, which is already on sale in the United States and Australia, comes in a kit comprising four tests and retails at a local pharmacy chain for $4.47 each. *AFP*

Double-gender butterfly

SINGAPORE—The world's first double-gender butterfly to be bred in captivity has been cultivated at a Singapore nature park, the Straits Times reported Wednesday. A Papilio Memnon with both female and male reproductive organs was discovered on Monday at the Butterfly Park on Sentosa Island, the daily reported senior curator Ithnine Atan as saying. Atan said such occurrences of gynandromorphs or hermaphrodites were very rare in the wild and had never been recorded in captivity. *AFP*

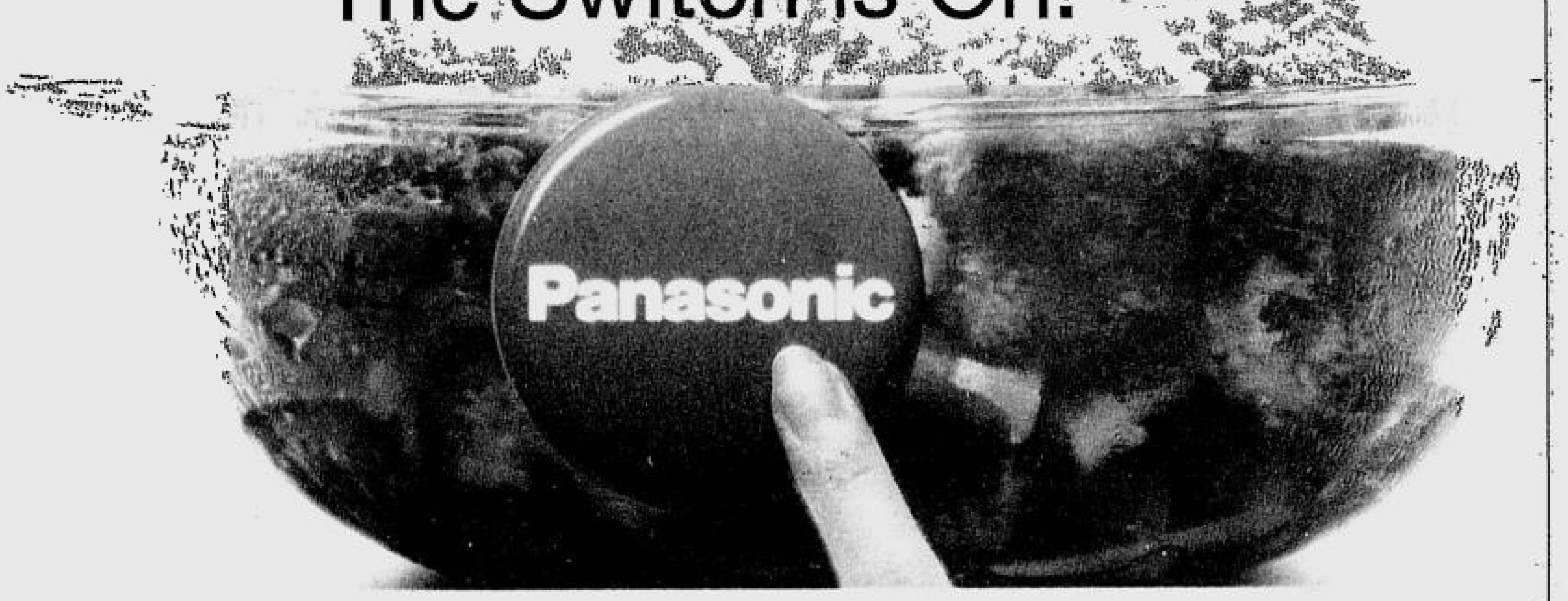
Morning-after pill

WASHINGTON—Emergency contraception—the morning-after pill—should be available in the United States without a prescription, on pharmacy shelves next to the aspirin and cough medicine, government advisers said. The largest US gynecologists' group had urged the move, saying it would greatly increase women's ability to get the pills in time to prevent pregnancy: within 72 hours of rape, contraceptive failure or just not using birth control. Used widely, emergency contraception could cut in half the country's 3 million unintended pregnancies each year, and in turn prevent hundreds of thousands of abortions, proponents told scientific advisers to the Food and Drug Administration. *AP*

2 get life for sex orgy

BEIJING—A Chinese court on Wednesday sentenced two people to life in prison for organizing a sex party for hundreds of Japanese tourists that caused an uproar in China, the government announced. Twelve other people were sentenced to up to 15 years in prison. The incident in September at a hotel in the southern Chinese city of Zhuhai fell on a sensitive wartime anniversary and caused outrage in China. *AP*

The Switch is On!



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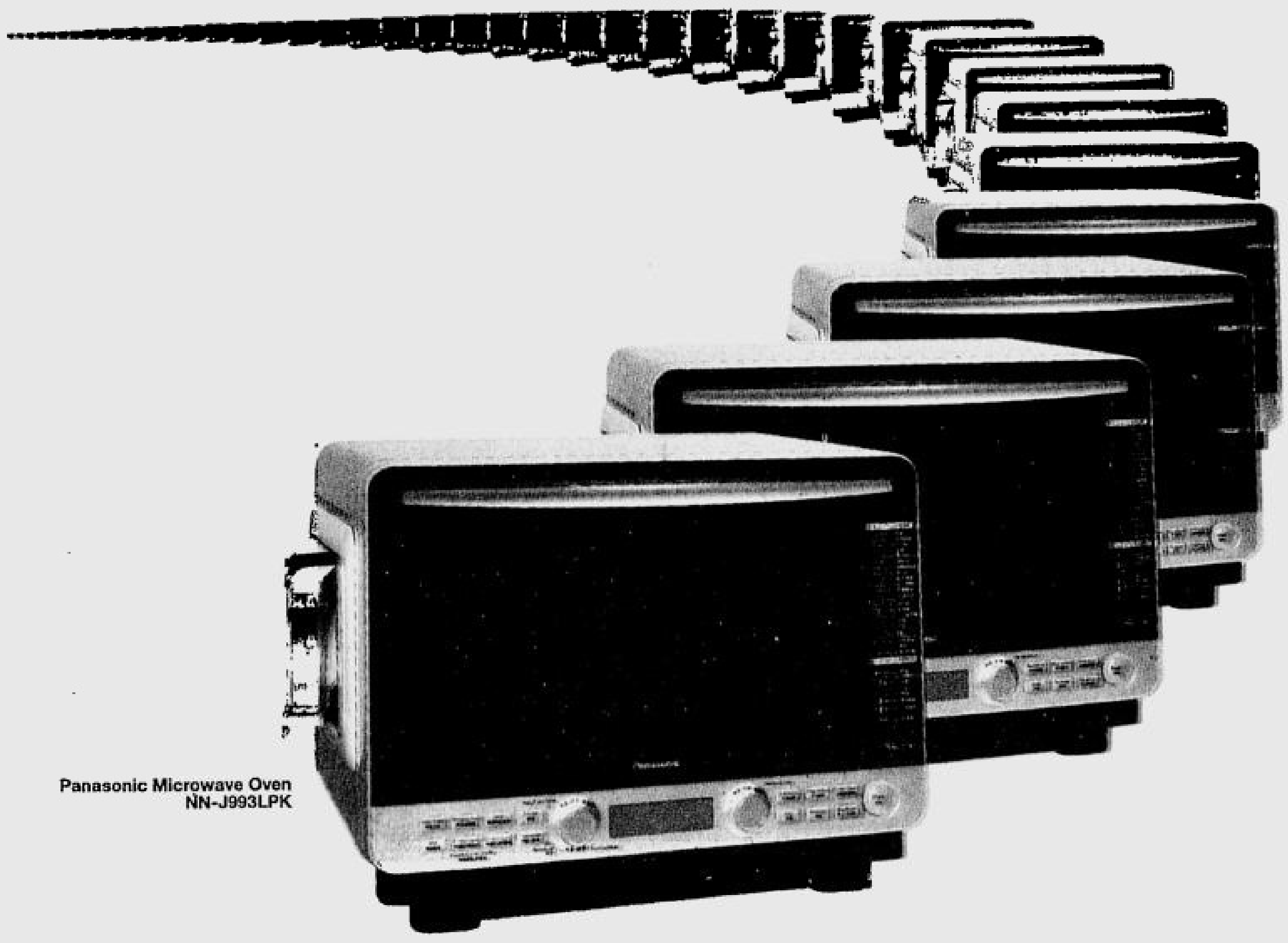

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EDITORIALS

Eulogy

SECRETARY of State Colin Powell of the United States has joined the chorus paying tribute to the late Foreign Secretary Blas F. Ople. Powell's tribute was even more lavish than those heaped on Ople by Filipino leaders, whose administrations Ople had served. But no tribute could have been more cherished by his family than the state funeral that President Macapagal-Arroyo has ordered for him.

Ople deserves Powell's eulogy but the US official's paeans can be better understood when seen in the light of how Ople's stewardship of the administration's foreign policy served the larger strategic interests of the United States. While Powell recognized Ople as "a renaissance man who won distinction as an academician, author, legislator and statesman," the giveaway was the statement that Ople was a "warm friend of the United States."

Powell could not have been more accurate than when he said that Ople "will be sorely missed in international circles, but he leaves behind a US-Philippine relationship that has grown stronger month by month since he took over the DFA." Even before Ople took over the helm of the Department of Foreign Affairs, he had played a pivotal role in making RP-US relations warmer, following the Senate ratification of the Visiting Forces Agreement. It was Ople, who was then chair of the Senate foreign affairs committee, who sponsored the measure. Ople pushed that swing toward restoring close security ties with the US by cementing President Macapagal's policy of alignment with President George W. Bush's war on terrorism and America's invasion of Iraq. Neither the State Department nor the Pentagon had any worries about the DFA, under Ople's leadership, deviating from the President's policy line.

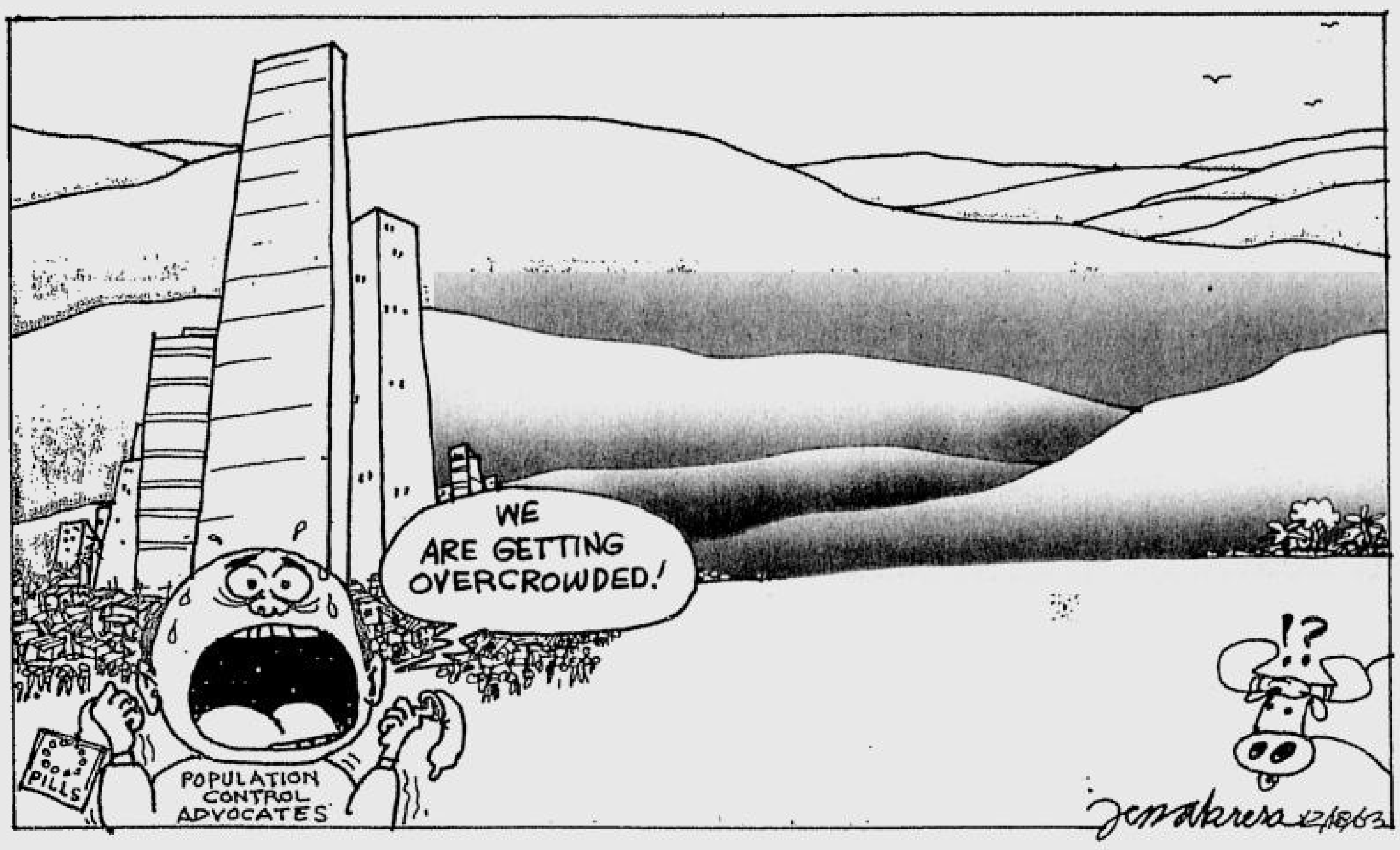
Continuity

NOW that the tributes have been paid, life has to go on in the DFA. Ople's demise leaves a big gap in administrative continuity of foreign policy. The President has not allowed a vacuum to set in by announcing that she would serve concurrently as foreign secretary, while she looked for Ople's replacement. Fortunately, the DFA does not want for experienced hands to fill the gap until a new government is elected in May 2004.

Ople passed away at a critical phase.. The country was entering a season of intense political activity associated with the start of the presidential campaign season. Without doubt, the President's foreign policy directions are firmly set and she is not unclear about her priorities. Domestic concerns and the demands of election campaign will claim her attention.

Still, by next month, Manila will play host to a historic summit of Asia-Pacific and Latin-American countries in the first ever hemispheric dialogue between two great cultures. This will be the first time it will do so since 1987 when the Philippines hosted, during the administration of President Aquino, the summit of new and restored democracies, including the Latin American countries that had thrown off the yoke of military dictatorships that had ruled them during the 1970s in the wake of the new wave of democratization in the post-war years. The Philippines has since been wrapped up in the regional cocoon of such organizations as Asean and Apec (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation). Next year's Latin American dialogue should open the door wider for inter-hemispheric relationship. It should be, for the Philippines, an opportunity to explore the revival of its historic, economic and cultural ties with Latin America, with which the Philippines shares many mutual interests as well as discuss the expansion of trade and economic relations.

Preparation for this dialogue requires a hands-on leadership at the DFA. Some names have been mooted to put the DFA on top of the new challenges. The names include former Foreign Secretary Roberto Romulo, Ambassador to the United Nations Lauro Baja, who may be temporarily recalled from his UN Security Council post, former Undersecretary Rodolfo Severino, until recently secretary general of Asean, and former Ambassador to London Cesar Bautista. Any one of these has the experience and strategic outlook to manage foreign policy in the next six months. With the policy framework already in place, a drift and vacuum in foreign policy management may be the last thing to be expected.



Requiem for a heavyweight

As I See It

Neal H. Cruz

THE DEATH of Blas F. Ople, journalist, intellectual, labor leader, labor secretary, senator, diplomat, has led me to think back to the days when he was poorer and we were neighbors in Newsmen's Row in Project 6, Quezon City.

Ople was already writing a column, "Jeepney Tales," in the Daily Mirror, when I was still studying journalism at the University of Sto. Tomas. I had already been hearing about his escapades after having drunk too much in any of Manila's bars though I never witnessed any. Ople was supposed to be noisily argumentative and quarrelsome when drunk, sometimes to the extent of firing his gun, but he was a gentleman-intellectual when sober. I received intellectual lessons during very long conversations lasting up to the wee hours of the morning when we were neighbors in Project 6.

I was newly married then and working for The Manila Chronicle and Ople was still working for the Mirror. Our houses stood back to back, with no fence between them (we were too poor to afford fences), and sometimes late at night, after coming home from work (not from the bars), Ople would just walk across our backyards and knock on my back door.

"I saw your light is still on" or "I heard your typewriter," he would explain, "and I'm not yet sleepy." Sometimes he would bring a couple of bottles of cold beer, other times I would open bottles from my refrigerator, and so the long discussions would begin, ending only when the eastern sky turned pink.

His favorite topic was the plight of labor, a subject in which I was initially uninterested. But after almost nightly lectures from Ople, I became so interested that when some editors and reporters started forming a labor union in the Chronicle, I promptly joined—and was as promptly harassed by management.

The union leaders and members were not given any assignments though we continued to receive our salaries. We didn't have to go to the office to work, only to receive our fortnightly pay, but we continued to report to the newsroom every day although the pro-management staffers refrained from talking to us. We were being given the cold shoulder to force us to resign. There were many offers from other newspapers, but Ople, who was kept abreast of what was happening by me and other sources, advised us to stay put.

"That's exactly what they want you to do," he said. "If you resign, they've already won."

When I told him about the emotional distress, he put an arm around me and said in his distinctive big voice, "*Talagang ganyan. Tiisin mo muna. Walang hirap, walang ginhawa.*"

To make a long story short, we won the labor case (management was accused of union busting) though by the time it was finished, all of the union members except three (Arnold Moss, Orly Aquino and Jimmy Vicente) had already transferred to other news organizations. I had transferred to The Evening News, and when Diosdado Macapagal, Gloria's father, became president, I was assigned to cover Malacañang. Macapagal's labor secretary was Eleuterio Adevoso, who hired Ople as his adviser and speechwriter.

One of Adevoso's priorities was to ease the plight of the *sacadas*, the migrant workers from Panay being exploited by labor contractors of the sugar planters of Negros.

Adevoso and Ople made frequent trips to Panay and Negros. Although I was covering Malacañang, Ople invited me, along with labor reporters, to accompany them.

That was how I first saw Ople at work in the field. He carried a portable typewriter and anywhere convenient, under a tree or in a hut, he would take it out and bat out a press release.

I also had a portable typewriter, a Smith Corona, but I couldn't bring it because Ople kept borrowing the carrying case to put his clothes in. He couldn't afford a small suitcase or traveling bag.

When Marcos became president, Ople set up a PR outfit in Medis Building in Intramuros and hired journalists and artists (Malang, Johnny Gatbonton, Rony Diaz and Salvador Bigay, among them). Marcos appointed him labor secretary.

Ople moved out of his house in Newsmen's Row, transferred to a much bigger house on Visayas Avenue and, later, to Corinthian Gardens where he lived until his death.

Ople's weaknesses were alcohol and cigarettes, which laid havoc to his cardiovascular system. When he had a stroke, doctors advised him to quit drinking and smoking. But while he was able to reduce his alcohol intake, he continued to be a chain-smoker. "They're the only things keeping me alive," he said.

During the necrological services for Salvador Bigay where Ople was to be the main speaker, I saw him outside the chapel, puffing on a cigarette.

"What are you doing here? You're supposed to be inside," I said.

"I'm just finishing this," he said, holding up his cigarette. But when he finished it, he lighted another one with the butt. Only when it was his turn to speak did he crush the butt and went inside. After delivering a short speech, he promptly went back outside and lighted another cigarette.

Knowing that I had had two heart bypass operations, and he had survived a stroke, he told me, "We're both survivors. Take care of yourself."

But he did not take care of himself. And so he did not survive.

* * *

TODAY'S JOKE: After Saddam Hussein was captured, President George W. Bush made a quick, secret trip to a US aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf to where Saddam had been taken. Bush interrogated him: "Where did you hide the weapons of mass destruction?"

Saddam: "We don't have them."

Bush: "Where are they, you Saddamabitch?"

Saddam: "Ah, Bush-shit!"

Ironies

There's the Rub

Conrado de Quiros

I DON'T know why the White House should be particularly elated at capturing Saddam Hussein. It's merely bound to compound the irony that has already become patent by this time, namely that the United States did not oust a heel, it produced a hero; it did not destroy a tyrant, it created a patriot; it did not undo a maniac, it made a martyr. At about this time last year, Saddam was a pariah not just in the Western world but in the Arab one. He was regarded as the bully of the region, not least by the Iranians, a good many of whom he had slaughtered through poison gases provided him by the not-so United States and the not-very Great Britain. A year later, he is being extolled by the Arab world, despite continuing formal execrations by its leaders, as a freedom-fighter.

His capture—and humiliation, which observers say is bound to stoke retaliatory strikes from followers and non-followers alike—isn't likely to make things better. At the very least, there is the no small matter of image, which seems lost to Washington's image-makers, who seem oblivious to a culture other than their own. Look at the picture of Saddam in the papers and TV, and ask yourself if he looked anywhere near as sympathetic when he was wearing his red beret and olive green military uniform glinting with medals. With his current long beard, long robes and ascetic looks (he was apparently caught hiding in a cave), he almost looks like a prophet.

Of course, Saddam remains a tyrant and mass murderer. Though one must continue to ask who helped him become so in the first place, who supplied him his weapons of mass destruction when he had his gaze trained on a neighbor which had pissed off the United States by ousting a tyrant who was friendly to it, the Shah of Iran. But more than that, it must be asked now who succeeded in turning him from tyrant and mass murderer to rebel and mass leader. The answer is George W. Bush and his cabal of warmongers.

They're the ones who stopped making Saddam look like a bully by bullying him. They're the ones who stopped making him look like a tyrant by tyrannizing his country. What is Saddam's crime for which he was hunted down like a dog and is now being paraded like a trophy? He never took part in 9/11—that much has been proven by American military intelligence itself. He never threatened America with weapons of mass destruction—that much too has been proven by the fact that no weapons of mass destruction were found in his country. Doubtless, he tyrannized his own people and gassed the Kurds, but that is something for the Iraqis and the Kurds to rectify, not Bush.

What can Saddam be charged with if he appears in the courts, American or international? With having the audacity to fight off the American invasion of his country? With having the temerity to resist the American occupation of his country? With having the arrogance to try to spoil the American designs on his country?

Condoleeza Rice was very pleased to inform the world last Monday that the dictator was now in the hands of his American captors and that the terrorist attacks in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities, which were his handiwork, aided by an inner circle that wanted to recover its privileges, were bound to abate. At the very least, she couldn't have picked the worst words to press her point. Dictator is not the easiest thing to attach to Saddam at a time when the United States refuses to agree to a multilateral supervision of Iraq or set a timetable for American withdrawal and self-rule by the Iraqis. And an inner circle that wants to retain its privileges is not the easiest thing to attach to Saddam's men when Bush and Rumsfeld are busy distributing contracts to their favorite CEOs, and have declared it their policy to reward only those who helped them invade Iraq while asking the world to help defray the costs of rebuilding the country they razed.

But more than this, Rice's optimism is founded on false premises. It boggles the mind how a dictator who has tyrannized his people with the aid of a few men who are concerned only about their privileges can find support among a populace. Or at least, cannot find enough animosity among them to be constantly in fear of being turned in. The notion that the populace is still in fear of them holds no water. The people clearly have more to fear from their conquerors than from their former oppressors. Their dead prove that. The only answer is that the people have forgotten a past cruelty in the face of a present and more obdurate one. The old cruelty merely divided them, the present one unites them.

That is the only explanation for the scale of the resistance to the American occupation over the past several months. It is not coming from Saddam loyalists, it is coming from the Iraqi people, most of whom never liked Saddam to begin with. That is the only explanation for why as far back as a month ago, the American death toll in Iraq already exceeded the figure reported during the first three years of Vietnam. That statistic comes from Reuters: From December 1961 to December 1964, some 392 Americans died during the Vietnam War. Since March 20 this year and as of a month ago, some 393 Americans have already died in Iraq. The record for the first three years of Vietnam was surpassed early last month when a rocket-propelled grenade killed the 393rd American soldier south of Baghdad. The death toll has grown by leaps and bounds since then. That is not the handiwork of a small group dedicated to recovering its privileges.

The war in Iraq won't stop with the capture of Saddam. It will only stop with the withdrawal of the American occupation army, in single file or, as in the case of Vietnam, as fast as their legs would carry them.

Beyond two basic issues

A LEADING economist, in a recent talk before a business group, related how the group of strategists handling opposition candidate Fernando Poe Jr. came to him about three weeks before FPJ announced that he would seek the presidency. The group asked the economist to brief them on vital issues affecting the country that FPJ would have to handle when elected president. The economist noted that he could not recognize anyone in that group, but nonetheless, since he was open to briefing any leader who sought it, he scheduled one for FPJ's strategists. He zeroed in first on farm-to-market roads and basic primary education for all, stressing that Thailand concentrated for 30 years on such roads and achieved self-sufficiency and greater economic growth. After the economist spoke on those issues, however, FPJ's group stopped him, saying their candidate could only absorb those two issues, and he can no longer comprehend beyond those.

The economist was stumped. What about the myriad other issues, much tougher and more complex than those two, that a president has to master each day and make decisions on? Can they wait until FPJ can be more absorptive? Who's going to think about them and make the tough decisions?

If the economist was stumped, so should we all be, for that episode shows how utterly dependent FPJ would be on advisers if elected. But advisers only remain advisers. The president still has to make the final decisions.

* * *

The INQUIRER recently featured the marathon dialogue that Prof. Saeed A. Daof, director general of the Center for the Promotion of Peace and Development of Mindanao (CCPDM), succeeded in conducting with Aleem Abdulaziz Mambintas, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's vice chair for military affairs and chair of its peace negotiating panel. It was a candid and frank exchange and I'd like to congratulate Daof for taking up Mambintas' invitation to his first official audience after the death of MILF chair Hashim Salamat.

Such a frank exchange is rare and it can happen only if the parties enjoy mutual trust and confidence. Obviously Daof enjoys the MILF leader's confidence. It's also extremely useful for gaining valuable insights that could improve mutual understanding between the rebel group and the government. For instance, what came through in Daof's account is Mambintas' belief that the immediate resumption of the peace talks and the early conclusion of a comprehensive peace agreement comprise the right path to achieving lasting peace and progress in Mindanao. This is reassuring to know, on the eve of the resumption of the stalled peace negotiations early next year.

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

* * *

For instance, Mambintas complained that the Macapagal administration listens far more to her military advisers than to her peace advisers. This may be his own perception, but it cannot be ignored by the government since the success of next month's negotiations could very well hinge on how much one side trusts the other. As gleaned from the interview, the MILF was quite comfortable with now Defense Secretary Eduardo Ermita as peace process adviser to the Palace, but now the rebel group is worried that his successor, PMS chief Silvestre Afable, may not be as understanding. Afable has to be aware of this. But Ermita's appointment as head of the defense department may be a blessing in disguise as it puts him in a position to "influence" the military's thinking vis-à-vis the MILF. He could be the bridge between the two warring groups.

* * *

Many good books are being published, indicating that despite the many problems this nation is facing, there is an intellectual ferment. Some time ago, Unilever Philippines' Howard Belton sent me two handsome coffee-table books that his company published as its contribution to the growing Filipiniana. These are "Pasig, River of Life" and "Laguna de Bay—The Living Lake." Authored by Reynaldo Gamboa Alejandro, the New York-based writer, choreographer and author of works on arts and culture, and Alfred Yuson, author of 12 books on poetry, fiction and essays, "Pasig, River of Life" is the first coffee-table book on the legendary waterway that runs through Metro Manila. Through this book, those of us who never got to know the glory and grandeur of the Pasig from past decades get a glimpse of them. It's fully illustrated with charming prints and paintings of the river over the decades, such as its front cover from the "Gallery of Prints" showing fishermen spreading their wide nets across a very idyllic river where fish teemed. The book contains contributions from notable writers and artists, thus serving as a valuable reference as well as "a reminder of the romance of centuries, and a bridge across the widening distance between our historic past and the appreciation of future generations."

* * *

"Laguna de Bay—The Living Lake" is also authored by Reynaldo Gamboa Alejandro, who was a recipient of the Outstanding Young Men in America award in 1981. Like its companion piece on the Pasig, this tome on our country's largest inland body of water and one of Asia's largest, is also fully illustrated with contributions from notable Filipino writers and researchers. It brings the history, legend and lore together with visions for the future of this lake that has been crucial to the life of Southern Luzon. Its front cover features a charming print from "Gallery of Print" depicting an early Spanish settlement along the lake. "Laguna de Bay—The Living Lake" can also serve as a reference and a bridge between the generations.

Congratulations to Unilever for these two beautiful books. We look forward to seeing its future literary productions.

A happy parting of ways

IT was the happiest parting of ways I've ever witnessed. In fact, the decision to sever ties was even announced in a press conference, and a dinner was thrown afterwards to celebrate the occasion.

Madame Lise Favre, the ambassador of Switzerland to the Philippines, hosted a dinner reception the other night in her Forbes Park residence in honor of the trustees and staff of the Foundation for a Sustainable Society Inc. (FSSI). The occasion was not typically one that called for a celebration, as they had just announced the exit of the Swiss government from the board of trustees. The decision, said Ambassador Favre, is a "vote of confidence in the foundation and its managers, who are working together with the Philippine government to bring FSSI closer to its vision and mission."

So that night, she added, they were celebrating "both endings and new beginnings," the end of the Swiss government's formal engagement as an observer, and a new phase in the foundation's life under a new management and pursuing re-engineered plans to achieve its mission "to make a difference in the lives of marginalized groups."

This might well have been just diplomatese employed to put a positive light on a negative situation, were it not for the presence of Matet Diokno-Pascual beside the ambassador. As chair of the FSSI, Diokno-Pascual looked happy enough to say goodbye to the Swiss presence on her board, while acknowledging the contribution of the Swiss government toward the creation of the foundation.

Indeed, as I bade the FSSI staff farewell, congratulating them on their "independence," they corrected me and said what they were celebrating was more like their "debut," a recognition of the organization's maturity and ability.

* * *

THE FSSI is actually the result of an innovative "debt-for-development" swap initiated by major Swiss development organizations. Motivated by the motto "Development requires debt relief," these Swiss NGOs successfully lobbied for the passage of the Swiss Debt Reduction Facility in 1991, calling for the Swiss government, on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation, to create an endowment fund which could be used to reduce the debt to Switzerland of many developing nations.

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

As Ambassador Fevre explained, the facility could be accessed either through outright debt write-off, or through a "creative debt relief" scheme, which the proponents favored. "Creative debt relief," she said, meant that instead of just simple debt cancellation, "the debtor country must put up in local currency a portion of the original debt to be primarily managed by representatives of civil society, for the financing of domestic development programs for the poor."

A total of 28 countries benefited from the debt reduction facility, with 11 choosing to employ the creative debt relief scheme. The Philippines was one of the 11, with the Philippine government setting up a counterpart fund of P454 million, at the time the equivalent of half of the total Philippine debt to Switzerland.

* * *

MOST of the countries implementing the creative debt relief scheme chose to repose the counterpart funds in organizations whose highest decision-making body was a bilateral committee whose members were representatives from the contracting governments.

Typically, the Philippines chose a different path. The P454 million was turned over to an independent body, a foundation created to manage the fund for the benefit of marginalized communities. This became the FSSI.

And this, remarked Ambassador Fevre, was how it really should be. The creation and performance of the FSSI, she added, "attests to the strong, dynamic NGO movement in the Philippines and the vital role it plays in the development process." As everybody laughed, the Ambassador added: "I am told that the country has the highest number of registered non-government organizations in the world," and it was with pride that she noted that the leading lights of the Philippine NGO community have at one time or another been connected with the FSSI.

Also present at the dinner were the new Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong and Agriculture Secretary Cito Lorenzo, testament not just to the personal popularity of Ambassador Fevre, but also to the continuing support of the Philippine government to the FSSI even if it has always played a "minor" role in the administration of the foundation.

* * *

AT PRESENT, the FSSI is committed to support and promote "sustainable enterprises that are community-oriented, ecologically sound and economically viable." The foundation has so far extended financial and technical assistance to about 300 projects amounting to over P200 million.

On the way to Ambassador Fevre's residence, I was listening to the radio and what news I heard on the political front was dispiriting, to say the least. Trading political gossip with the other guests later, we came to the conclusion that it was no longer profitable to ponder national politics and its impact on our country's future. Hope lay not in our national leaders, we said, but in communities and grass-roots efforts, where ordinary people are carrying out small but meaningful and useful projects to better their lives and futures.

Perhaps the future looks bleak given the miserable lot we are being asked to choose from for our national leadership. But with groups like the FSSI, and friends like the Swiss, maybe there's something to look forward to still, yes, even in the Philippines.

Homecoming

I WAS at the preview a few days ago of Gil Portes' "Homecoming," one of the entries in the 2003 Metro Manila Film Festival. The film is about one overseas Filipino worker's (OFW) homecoming: what it meant to her, her family, her small town, her country. It's not only an eye-opener, it is also a heart-opener. And it is based on true-to-life events. But this is getting ahead of the story.

While watching the movie, other stories (movie material no doubt) were playing at the back of my mind. These were the magazine features and column pieces about OFWs that I had written in the past decade or so. (One feature story, I remember, dates back to the 1980s.) Gosh, I thought, these could make more than a dozen movie scripts. Some of the stories were so raw, so real, so surreal, so dramatic, so cinematic.

One was about a domestic helper (DH) who killed the Saudi princess who abused her without let-up. I still have photocopies of her letters to her daughters that detailed the torment that she went through day in and day out. One letter, written on the hotel's stationery and still to be sent, was found by the Filipino consul on the DH's person, stained by the princess' blood.

The tragedy happened in a five-star hotel in Cairo where the princess and the Filipino DH were then staying. Good thing it happened in Egypt and not in the princess' native Saudi Arabia where the DH could have been beheaded.

I remember referring the DH's distraught daughters to the Good Shepherd Sisters' Center for Overseas Workers. I understand their mother has been released after serving time in an Egyptian prison and is now back home. (I would like to get in touch with her.)

And there was this DH who worked as one of the ladies in waiting in a Saudi royal household. Her stories and the photographs she showed, which we used, were straight out of "A Thousand and One Nights."

Heart-stopping were the harrowing tales of OFWs during the 1991 Gulf War. Fleeing through the desert, braving extreme heat and extreme cold, streaming in droves to find places of safety. A modern-day exodus sans a Moses. The wonder of it was that the OFWs even found time to take photographs of themselves in distress.

HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo

And of course, I didn't forget Flor Contemplacion who was hanged in Singapore. And there were these DHs in Hong Kong who went into same-sex romantic relationships to ease their loneliness. This arrangement, they reasoned, was safe and worry-free as far as pregnancy and STD were concerned.

One time, someone wrote via e-mail to ask for a copy of something I had written on a rape case. I could not, for the life of me, recall that I had written about it. Only later did I remember.

Not all stories were tragic though. There were stories of hope. And these were mostly about efforts done on the home front, stories about what people who were left behind did to cope and to make sure their next of kin who slaved away abroad did not toil in vain.

Whenever I was asked to contribute some sweat to book projects on OFWs, I always gave my yes. It is the least I can do for Filipinos who brave the high seas, deserts and inhospitable climes in order to ensure their family's survival, and our economy's too.

Last year the International Press Service came out with the creatively packaged "Risks and Rewards: Stories from the Migration Trail," written by journalists from different parts of the world. NGOs Balikabayani and Atikha published "Coming Home: Women Migration and Reintegration" which was about the life women OFWs lived abroad and their families back home, and the efforts being made to make reintegration worthwhile and fruitful.

Yesterday I received from Atikha the written accounts of children of OFWs who have formed the Batang Atikha Saver's Club in Batangas and Laguna. Atikha is an NGO involved in providing economic and psychosocial services to OFWs and their families. The Batang Atikha Membership Club is a venue for value formation sessions for the young. The saver's club is a new endeavor. More on this another time.

Some of the things that warm my heart are letters from OFWs who send feedback via e-mail to this column. Some offer help and ask to be connected to individuals or groups in need.

Now on "Homecoming" the movie. If you must see only one or two movies during the holidays, make sure "Homecoming" is it or one of them. It stars Alessandra de Rossi (who did so well in Portes' "Mga Munting Tinig") who plays Abigail, a caregiver in Toronto who comes home after five years to marry her childhood sweetheart. She gets a hero's welcome.

The movie blurb says, "Her journey begins when she returns." Abigail brings home hope, but unknown to her and to many, she also brings home a dreaded virus that would disrupt life in the town of San Isidro.

"Homecoming" draws part of its theme and plot from the SARS epidemic that swept parts of Asia and Canada early this year. But the film is more than just a story on health and disease. It is about individuals, family and the Filipino society in the grip of fear.

Old traditions, friendships, family ties as well as religious faith are tested, literally and figuratively. This virus suddenly exposes the many weaknesses of individuals and society, governments and institutions. It also reveals the strengths and goodness of the Filipino.

Go watch it.

Today is International Migrant Workers Day.

* * *

Shelter for abused women. Nuns from different congregations have set up a new home for women victims of violence. The place still needs many things: mattresses, furniture, appliances, linen, kitchen utensils, etc. If you have stuff (used or unused) to give away, please call 0916-3803574.

* * *

Send comments to cerespd@info.com.ph

Thirteen

I DO not have the body of an athlete. Singing is not a gift given to me. At 14, I still could not find God's "gift" for me. Worried about my apparent lack of talent, I prayed to Him to send me a sign.

It came last year through the Personal Computer for Public Schools (PCPS) project. (PCPS is a project of former Trade Secretary Mar Roxas and the government of Japan that distributes to public high schools computer eLabs.) My gift? A PC that was more than a PC, clothing me from my technological nakedness, curing me of the cancer of inferiority and making me proud to be a boy from the barrio.

YOUNG BLOOD

Julius Aniceto D. Cebreros

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

I was a high school junior then. As a member of the staff of our school paper, The Courier, I was assigned to write a story about the project. Upon entering the room, 20 white boxes with blinking lights greeted me. I looked at them with awe, remembering that these boxes were responsible for such great things as flying planes, counting money and even saving lives.

Emerging from my stupor, I resolved to master the blinking box. There was a glitch, however: formal computer classes were only given to seniors.

Far from being disheartened, I settled for the next best thing. I began to spend my free time in that room, among the blinking boxes. Usually, I stayed from 4 to 5:30 p.m., so I had my teacher for company. I sat in the second row, in front of PC No. 13.

I do not know exactly how it happened, but as the days passed, a sort of bond developed between PC No. 13 and me. My teacher noticed it, too, and she started reserving the seat for me.

It was awkward at first. I sat in front of Thirteen's screen, staring blankly for what seemed like hours. I didn't really know what to do.

Then it happened. A tap on the buttons with letters and numbers got things going. Tap. Tap. Tap. It was like the sound of music.

As the days passed, the tapping became faster, more vigorous. Then almost before I realized it, I had learned to type!

That realization only whetted my desire to learn more about Thirteen. I volunteered to type my best friend Herson's assignments. I quickly progressed from Word to Powerpoint.

There were hassles, of course, but I knew that mastery comes from constant practice. And Thirteen's F1 was always willing to help.

A few months later, my skills were put to a test. I was assigned to be the encoder-cum-layout artist in our school's Desktop Publishing Team in the Division Schools Press Conference. I felt honored but I also recognized the exacting nature of the assignment and the heavy responsibility it required.

I turned to Thirteen, and my buddy gladly obliged. He and I practiced every day. In the hallways, the passionate tapping blended harmoniously with the spattering of the rain.

The competition saw me and my teammates sweating. First, the software we were supposed to use, PageMaker, was something our team had never heard of. Second, the other teams, especially those from Borongan, Guian and Dolores, were ahead of us in terms of exposure to PCs. Lastly, the computer given to us could not compare with Thirteen, being too slow and inconsiderate.

The other competitors were laughing at us. They obviously knew the program while we had to badger the proctor with questions.

I was close to despair when Thirteen came into my mind. I remembered how awkward our initial meetings were and realized that it was all a matter of determination. The PC assigned to us was like Thirteen, a white blinking box. So I focused on the screen and the tapping, and the sounds that came out were sweet testimony to the fierce struggle of a barrio boy and his team to prove that technology was for everyone.

At day's end, we were proclaimed champions, having finished 15 minutes ahead of time.

God did not give me a body like Mr. Universe's, or bestow upon me a deep baritone. The one thing He gave me was Thirteen, the white box with the blinking face, who came with the PCPS.

The PCPS opened a new world for me to master. As long as I follow its teachings, technical and personal, I will never get lost in the intricate puzzle that is the modern world.

Julius Aniceto D. Cebreros, 16, is a senior at Taft National High School in Taft, Eastern Samar. This piece was his winning entry in the Essay Writing Contest for PCPS Beneficiary Students.

Will and Grace

Grace

I'M not Grace. He's not Will. But if you are familiar with the TV sitcom "Will and Grace," you know what I mean. He is the guy any girl would pine for. Tall, dark, handsome, with a body to die for.

The first time I met him, a mere handshake sent thousands of volts through my body. His smile was perfect. I didn't waste a fraction of a second to know his name, his phone number, and even his shoe size! (Don't ask me why.)

I had a boyfriend that time, but he ceased to exist the moment I laid eyes on my new friend. I was in love with a stranger.

We secretly went out, hoping that each time we kissed, our feelings would deepen, leading to… love. I became so trusting, so open, heedlessly giving in to something very precarious. I considered each and every dinner we ate, every movie we watched, and every walk we took as something very special. All those times spent with him were pure happiness and, I thought, endless.

I broke up with my boyfriend, hoping that "Will" and I could then be together. I was wrong. That very same day, he told me that he had tried to fall for me, to love me, but just like the cliché said, it was not just meant to be.

I was devastated. I kept asking myself over and over again, "How could something so right be completely gone?" It took a while for me to forget him. It was so hard to go on, to stop thinking of the what-ifs. Doomed with my thoughts, I simply stopped debating with myself, knowing that it was hopeless to try to find the answers to all my questions.

Months later, he called, pretending that nothing unusual had happened. I was ready to be swept back into his arms again. The hurt was gone when he told me that he loved me—even before. I was confused. He tried to explain what happened, and I listened.

The mystery of that miserable day was finally broken: He is bisexual. He wanted us to be a couple that time but he was so afraid that the truth might make things worse.

I was speechless, silently debating with myself. It was pointless. What was he expecting from me? What would happen now?

We both don't know. Sometimes it is very hard to accept people as they really are. Our expectations force them to be dishonest to others and, most of all, to themselves.

I always ask myself if I'm mature enough to accept him. Maybe I am, maybe not. But it's worth trying, isn't it?

"Grace," 22, is a graduate of the Ateneo de Manila University. She is happy with her love life and "Will" still describes himself as cute.

When laws become suggestions

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

YOU'RE driving, say on Ortigas, toward Edsa and see the traffic light showing a green arrow. You prepare to turn left, only to realize that several hundred buses, jeeps and cars are coming through on Edsa, like a horde of elephants ready to trample you down.

What happened was that a traffic aide took over and was giving instructions exactly opposite to what the traffic lights were signaling. If you saw the traffic aide (and you're bound not to if you were looking at the traffic light suspended up in the air), you would have stopped on green. Consider yourself lucky if you're not ticketed for a traffic violation... or worse. I've had at least two friends who got into accidents because they obeyed the traffic lights, not knowing a policeman or traffic aide had taken over.

Such scenes are repeated hundreds of times each day in Metro Manila. Supposedly, the traffic aides' manual directing of traffic is more efficient because they can adjust the flow of vehicles according to the number of cars. Thus, even if the traffic light is red, they'll tell you to proceed if there aren't cars coming in the other direction.

Granting that this manual directing helps ease up traffic, I will say it does more harm in the long run because it reinforces the very serious cognitive dissonance that's behind our traffic problems.

Let me explain that fancy term. In the 1950s, the psychologist Leon Festinger first wrote about this phenomenon of cognitive dissonance, a psychological state where the individual is caught between two conflicting cognitive states. We see this every day in our traffic situation. The traffic light may be red, which many of us remember, from our books way back in Grade One, means "stop," but the traffic aide is furiously signaling you, "Go, stupid, go."

It's not just a matter of disregarding traffic lights. I'm often caught in a situation where the policeman or traffic aide orders you to take over the opposite lanes to create a counterflow, sometimes even while standing next to a sign that reads, "No Counter-flow Allowed." I loathe these counter-flows, finding them grossly unfair because you're really jumping the queue.

The policemen and traffic aides are making you create these counter-flows, again supposedly to keep the traffic flowing. It doesn't, because although you move up the line, you eventually have to merge back into the correct lanes. This is a major cause of gridlocks, as traffic flow is jammed in all directions. Yet I'm sure the majority of Filipino drivers will say it's OK to do counter-flows because they've seen the police ordering them.

Festinger wrote that people will find ways to reduce the dissonance, reconfiguring their minds to resolve the conflicts. One of the earliest columns I did, about five years back, was about an encounter I had with a taxi driver who had run a red light. When I protested, he smiled and calmly explained to me that traffic lights were only suggestions. Cognitive dissonance solved.

At that time my friends found the story amusing, some even thinking I was joking. These days when I share that anecdote, people claim they've heard similar arguments from other drivers, friends and relatives. I suspect we're slowly getting to the point of no return where the majority of local drivers believe traffic rules and regulations are only suggestions, especially if there is no one looking.

The latest MMDA traffic experiments are bound to worsen this terrible culture, with the Quezon Memorial Circle being the most extreme breeding site. For weeks now, the Circle has become one racing track, vehicles speeding around without ever needing to stop, except, very rarely, for pedestrians to cross. Yet, the traffic lights are still there, religiously blinking away green, yellow and red, functioning now as Christmas lights. Stop on a red light and you can get into a terrible accident with the speeding cars behind you.

Not only that, on the Circle, there are no rules on how you should switch lanes. You're in the innermost and realize you need to turn right into one of the avenues. What should you do? No problem. Just hold your breath and swerve. The same "rule" applies for vehicles coming in from one of the avenues into the Circle. Only in the Philippines have I seen vehicles moving diagonally across nine lanes in nine seconds!

I know MMDA officials mean well, hoping to keep vehicles moving. That's why they also have all these experiments on Edsa and Quezon Boulevard where they've banned most left and right turns on intersections. This allows motorists to just drive straight through, again disregarding all the blinking traffic lights. But I wonder if commuting time is actually reduced. You breeze along but only for as long as you don't need to turn. If you do, then you have to find one of those rare U-turn slots, which means a descent into hell as four or five lanes of desperate motorists compete with you for the two-lane slot. The time you saved racing along is eaten up negotiating the U-turn slots, with a lot of dangerous adrenaline pumped through your body.

Again, in the long run, anticipate new problems. In most countries, U-turns are discouraged because they are inefficient, clogging up traffic or causing accidents. But because the MMDA has created all these U-turn slots, watch motorists all over the country create their own slots. Add that to the older problems of do-it-yourself counter-flows, lane swerving and running through a red light, and you have a recipe for major disasters.

I have some simple suggestions for the MMDA. One is to turn off the traffic lights if you have an aide or policeman. The traffic lights on Quezon Memorial Circle should be used, for the sake of motorists and pedestrians. And the counter-flows? They just aren't helpful at all, in the short or long term.

When our law enforcers tell us those rules are only suggestions, there can be no talk of discipline at all. Be clear and be consistent about law enforcement, and the discipline will follow. Otherwise, it's a mad free-for-all world out there, a concrete jungle in the worst sense of the term.

* * *

Comments to miguel@pinoykasi.net

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Review Farmer as Importer Program

LETTERS
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

RECORDS will show that the Farmer as Importer Program (FIP) of National Food Authority council chair Angelito Sarmiento and the Macapagal administration (the NFA only co-implemented it with the Land Bank of the Philippines and the Bureau of Customs), has been a dismal failure and has bred corruption and exploitation of farmers and their cooperatives.

The NFA and BOC reports show that only 91 farmers' organizations (FOs) have participated in this program but these FOs have only been able to bring in a total of 138,349.5 metric tons of rice or just 35 percent of the 400,000 MT that were made available to the FOs under the FIP.

This merely confirmed what 99 percent of the people's organizations and non-government organizations were saying during consultations conducted by the NFA and the Department of Agriculture in preparation for the formulation of the guidelines for this FIP, that most of the FOs do not have the technical and financial capacity to effectively participate in this program. It should be noted that it will require more than P150 million to import 10,000 MT of rice, which is the volume of importation per FO under the program. We also pointed out in those consultations that it is inconsistent for the government to encourage rice farmers to increase productivity and attain self-sufficiency on the one hand, and to ask them to import rice on the other.

In terms of availment of allocations for the importation of rice, the said 519 FOs availed for a total of 315,953 MT—much higher than the actual imported volume of 138,000 MT. This would mean that many of these FOs speculated and applied for allocations even though they did not have the capacity to import such allocations, many of them apparently with the intention of merely selling such allocations to traders or what the government now calls "joint-venture" partners of the FOs.

The public hearings conducted by the House committee on good government have also exposed that many of these FOs were merely used by rice traders as "dummies" to get hold of import allocations, which were privileges that the government (on paper) extended only to FOs. In exchange, the farmers' organizations were even short-changed by these traders. Of the potential profit of P40 million to P80 million for every 10,000 MT of imported rice, testimonies of farmer leaders revealed they were only paid P300,000 to P400,000.

The FIP also exposes the whole rice farming sector to the adverse effects of "technical smuggling" that this program may have further encouraged.

Thus, we find no reason why the government should continue implementing the FIP program, which clearly has not benefited the rice farming sector—but has only benefited a handful of "traders," their brokers and probably some smugglers.

—VICENTE A. FABE,
national chair,
Pambansang Kilusan ng mga
Samahang Magsasaka,
59 C. Salvador St., Quezon City

Reclaimed area squatters

PARAÑAQUE Mayor Joey Marquez and MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando should look into the status of the area where they had planned to build a bus terminal and *tiangge*—the reclaimed area across Baclaran Church. That space is now overrun by all sorts of squatters, mostly Muslims. They have even built a mosque there.

Somebody should look into this matter and soon.

—MICHELLE R. CRUZ,
mitzircruz@yahoo.com

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GMA junks 'Jose Pidal' bid

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday picked incumbent Lakas Rep. Apolinario Lozada Jr. over her own brother-in-law, Ignacio "Iggy" Arroyo, as the administration candidate for the fifth district of Negros Occidental.

Ms Macapagal gave the assurance to Lozada in the presence of Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr., Lakas-CMD president, and presidential legislative adviser Gabriel Claudio in Malacañang.

Iggy Arroyo became controversial when he claimed ownership over the secret Jose Pidal accounts that opposition Sen. Panfilo Lacson said belong to First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo.

Iggy Arroyo is planning to run against Lozada, who is seeking re-election. Lozada was earlier stripped of the chairmanship of the Lakas in his province.

The President told Lozada that she would uphold the equity of the incumbent, the unwritten rule giving party priority to the incumbent official in an electoral contest.

"I take the President's assurance. I'm glad with the development," Lozada said.

He declined to speculate on what Iggy Arroyo's plan would be after the President's decision.

But the President reportedly told Lozada that she had already discussed the matter with Iggy Arroyo.

Claudio said the decision was not unexpected because the party abides by the equity of the incumbent in deciding whom to field in various elective posts.

"That is the standard rule," Claudio said.

In Bacolod City, Iggy Arroyo Jr. said he was not surprised about the reported endorsement of her sister-in-law of the re-election bid of Lozada.

Arroyo, however, said he does not bear ill feelings toward the President, saying her decision only shows that she respects the equity of the incumbent.

Lozada, a member of the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats is on his second term as congressman of Negros Occidental's fifth district and is seeking a third and last term next year.

"It shows she is a good president who respects the rules not withstanding kinship," said Arroyo Jr.

Still, Arroyo Jr., Lakas-CMD chair for Western Visayas, said he remains unfazed, as the President's endorsement to Lozada does not bother him.

He said he will proceed with his plan to face Lozada in the elections either under the banner of Kampi, another party affiliated with Ms Macapagal, or as an independent candidate.

Lozada merely smiled when asked if President Macapagal had endorsed him.

Despite talk that he has been offered the foreign affairs portfolio, Lozada said he is set on seeking for a third term.

Lozada was in Malacañang yesterday for the signing of the national coalition agreement between the Lakas-CMD and the Nationalist People's Coalition.

Arroyo Jr. came out in the open first in an exclusive interview with GMA 7 broadcast journalist Arnold Clavio to claim that he was Jose Pidal.

Lacson said the Pidal accounts were repository of ill-gotten wealth amassed by the First Gentleman, which the President's husband denied.

ARROYO

The Pidal accounts contained money donated to the campaign of Ms Macapagal when she run for vice president in 1998. *With reports from Carla P. Gomez, PDI Visayas Bureau*

John Hay exec says SC ruling to turn casino into a 'loser'

BAGUIO CITY—A casino at Camp John Hay has become a losing venture following a Supreme Court ruling that orders government to collect full taxes from special economic zones (SEZ) administered by the Bases Conversion Development Authority.

Royal Highlands Inc., which had offered to manage a casino inside the Camp John Hay SEZ, had been banking on an economic zone tax cap of 5 percent like all John Hay investors, said Liza Pagano-Calde, counsel for BCDA-affiliate John Hay Management Corp. (JHMC).

But the Supreme Court ruled with finality on Oct. 28 that while BCDA economic zones like Camp John Hay are legal, these facilities are not allowed the same tax incentives enjoyed by the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (Peza).

Calde said BCDA got wind of the ruling only last week, although it was still awaiting a formal notice from the tribunal.

The court responded to a nine-year-old petition from the John Hay Alternative Development Coalition (JHADC), which questioned Proclamation 420 that granted all John Hay SEZ investors huge tax dividends.

The proclamation was signed in 1994 by former President Fidel Ramos to supplement a joint venture agreement between former BCDA chair Victor Lim and a consortium led by the Taiwan-based Tuntex Co. Ltd. and Asiaworld International.

Opposition from JHADC forced Tuntex to withdraw its investments, but the proclamation still covered John Hay's 1995 investors. *Vincent Cabreza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Alarm raised on overfishing

MATI, Davao Oriental—Fishermen here have raised alarm over the intrusion of large fishing vessels from General Santos City into the waters of Davao Oriental saying their activities threaten to deplete the province's fish supply, particularly tuna.

Councilor Cesar de Erio said local fishermen want the municipal government to immediately act on their complaint.

"Local fishermen have complained that since the large-scale fishing vessels from General Santos City were allowed to fish within the municipal waters of Mati, their catch have significantly declined," De Erio said.

De Erio said local fishermen want the municipal government to ban the entry of General Santos City fishers.

Mario Matinloc, one of the protesting fishermen, said they have no match to the sophisticated equipment being used by their counterparts from General Santos.

"Their highly-sophisticated fishing vessels have significantly reduced the tuna population here that is why we are asking the municipal government to shoo them away," Matinloc said. *Ferdinand O. Zuasola, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

ROUNDUP

Mayor unhurt in blast

CABANATUAN CITY—A town mayor and his companions were unhurt Monday in an explosion in Carranglan, Nueva Ecija. A police report said Mayor Luvimindo Otic of Carranglan, together with some municipal officials and employees, was walking to the town hall at 8 a.m. when he heard a mild explosion at a nearby waiting shed. The explosion came from a small bag that contained two small battery casings filled with assorted pointed objects, an unknown chemical and gunpowder, the report said. Otic, who lives 500 meters from the town hall, is a member of the Bagong Lakas ng Nueva Ecija (Balane) party and is seeking reelection next year. *Anselmo Roque, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

Fire razes P30M property

DAGUPAN CITY—Property and equipment worth P30 million were destroyed in a three-hour fire that gutted three buildings of the Luzon University (formerly Luzon Colleges) on Monday afternoon. No one was reported hurt in the fire as classes were cancelled and students were sent home after the fire broke out at 4:30 p.m. Senior Insp. Jesus Orpilla, city fire marshal, said the fire could have been caused by faulty wiring. Orpilla said the fire started from the fifth floor of the east building that housed the colleges of criminology and accounting. *Yolanda Sotelo-Fuertes, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

4 fishermen missing

SUBIC, Zambles—Four fishermen from this town have been reported missing at sea since Dec. 5 while fishing in the southern coastal area of Zambales. Vice Gov. Ramon Lacbain II said the relatives of the missing fishermen sought his help to locate Edwin Bais, 36; Jefferson Pailip, 19; Abing Daligdig, 40; and a certain "Kiko," all residents of Barangay Calapandayan here. The fishermen's relatives said the group left on Dec. 1 on board a 36-foot motorized fishing boat "Geraldine Dos." The group usually stay for five days in the seas of Zambales and return home on the sixth day, said Lily Bais, a relative of the fishermen. *Allan Macatuno, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

DPWH to lay off 600

BAGUIO CITY—The Department of Public Works and Highways in the Cordillera will lay off more than 600 casual employees at the end of the year. Antonio Purugganan, DPWH regional director, however, said the casuals would still be employed by the DPWH on a "per-job" basis. Some of the casuals, the INQUIRER learned, had been working for the DPWH for at least 10 years. Purugganan said the Department of Budget and Management had stopped allocating funds for the casuals' salaries since August. *Frank Cimatu, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

I killed in Lucena fire

LUCENA CITY—A two-hour fire of still unknown origin killed a youngster and gutted at least 30 houses in a poor area in Barangay 8 early Monday afternoon. The fire also rendered homeless about 50 families, who were evacuated in a nearby public school building. Police identified the lone casualty as Alexis Romano Escalderon, 13, and son of a village councilor and a local policeman. *Delfin T. Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Bomb scare at GSIS

LEGAZPI CITY—An explosive was found in a plastic bag left at the lobby of the Government Service Insurance System office in Sorsogon City on Monday and scared insurance benefit claimants and employees. The bomb was discovered by the guard on duty after he noticed an abandoned plastic bag inside the two-story GSIS office. Experts from the explosives and ordnance divisions of the provincial and city police offices had it detonated by using a water cannon. Sorsogon police chief Senior Supt. Arne de los Santos said the device was composed of three pieces of 9-volt power source, two bottles of gasoline, wiring with bulb filament and 3 large 'super lolo' firecrackers. The device, however, failed to explode as it lacked a blasting cap and proper triggering mechanism, said De los Santos who is an explosive expert himself. *Ronnie Lorejo, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

GMA sets key meet with govs, mayors on kidnap

By Tonette Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

CAMP OLIVAS, Pampanga—President Macapagal-Arroyo was expected to meet with governors and mayors of Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog today to "get the act together" of local governments, the police and the military in the heightened anti-kidnapping campaign, said anti-kidnapping czar Angelo Reyes.

"The purpose of that meeting is to precisely get our act together, to see to it that everybody is on board, looking at the same thing, the same perspective and be mutually supportive," Reyes, chief of the National Anti-Kidnapping Task Force (Naktaf), said.

He was here on Tuesday to brief police officials on the Naktaf's efforts in curbing kidnapping for ransom.

Reyes said the police and military commanders in the two regions nearest to Metro Manila were expected to present to the President their specific plans to stop kidnappings in their areas.

Ms Macapagal, he said, is also facilitating a dialogue "to see to it there's cooperation among local officials who have a very, very important role to play in peace and order, and in the implementation of security measures."

Reyes did not name the kidnap-for-ransom groups operating in Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog but Naktaf had added 14 more "most wanted persons" in its list of order of battle.

Seven men in the initial list were mostly from Southern Tagalog.

Chief Supt. Vidal Querol, Central Luzon police chief, said at least two kidnap-for-ransom groups operate in the region.

Central Luzon policemen had killed Dr. Roberto Obeles Yap, allegedly the top kidnap-for-ransom group leader in the country, in an encounter in Bataan on Nov. 20.

Querol said Reyes is "ready to provide a reward" to civilian informants who helped the police get Yap.

PICKING up the pieces from an anti-kidnapping campaign neglected and revived, anti-kidnapping czar Angelo Reyes sifts through weapons and equipment left at a raid on a kidnap gang's lair in Bataan last month. JOAN BONDOC/PDI PHOTO

Reyes said the drive against kidnap gangs has expanded to Central Luzon and Southern Tagalog because these regions are near Metro Manila, where more than 50 percent of kidnap cases occurred.

He said members of these kidnap gangs could seek refuge in Metro Manila and in nearby regions.

He said the police and the military are continuing the security measures adopted to stop kidnap for ransom and other crimes. These are the setting-up of choke points, checkpoints, mobile checkpoints and satellite police stations.

"(We do not wish to create) an impression of a garrison state. We are not working toward that direction. We are just trying to coordinate and integrate our efforts," he said.

Reyes, former defense secretary whose decision to turn against ousted President Joseph Estrada was key to the rise to power of Ms Macapagal, also said his work at Naktaf has "no political color."

"I'm not here (to gun for an elective position). I'm here to do a job. I'm walking the beat. This thing has no political color. I was offered the public works (portfolio), I refused it; I was offered this job, I accepted this job. There's a job to do here," he said.

Gloria drops Gonzalez appointment as DOJ head

By Raj Padilla and Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—President Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday said the reported plan to appoint House Deputy Speaker Raul Gonzalez as justice secretary would not push through.

In a voice clip aired over radio station dyFM Bombo Radyo, Ms Macapagal said the post was offered to Gonzalez "but he refused to accept it."

Instead, she said Gonzalez was more interested to be the campaign manager of the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats in Western Visayas.

She said Gonzalez will guard the votes for her.

Gonzalez is on his third and final term. He is fielding his son, City Councilor Raul Gonzalez Jr. in the House race in Iloilo City.

He was reported to be a candidate to replace Justice Secretary Simeon Datumanong who was expected to vacate his post to run for a House seat.

But Senate President Franklin Drilon, a native of Iloilo, reportedly wrote to President Macapagal, blocking Gonzalez's appointment.

The two-page letter supposedly written by Drilon listed alleged cases of harassment by Gonzalez against members of the Iloilo media.

Copies of the letter were being circulated here. But Gonzalez earlier told the INQUIRER that he was not aware of the letter.

But if it existed, he said it was "unfair for (Drilon) to hit me without discussing (the complaints) with me."

He questioned why Drilon took the reported complaints "hook, line and sinker," saying he was the one being harassed by the Iloilo media.

The letter, a copy of which was obtained by the INQUIRER, was written with the letterhead of the Senate and bearing Drilon's signature.

Iloilo-based publisher Danny Fajardo said Drilon gave him a copy of the letter. Fajardo is openly at odds with Gonzalez whom he accused of harassing him.

Drilon would neither confirm nor deny the letter's existence.

Graft raps recommended vs 24 Iloilo City officials

By Ma. Diosa Labiste
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—The Office of the Ombudsman-Visayas has recommended the filing of graft charges against the city's 24 elected officials and employees of both the previous and current administration for their involvement in a P130-million housing project, which was allegedly fraught with irregularities.

Among those found recommended charged were Mayor Jerry Trenas and his predecessor Mansueto Malabor, who was mayor from 1992 to 2001.

Trenas welcomed the filing of the cases as a chance to clear his name.

Also found liable were members of the previous city council—former vice mayor Guillermo dela Llana and former city councilors Rolando Dabao, German Gonzales, Jose Junio Jacela, Eduardo Lacsi, Perla Zulueta, Julie Baronda and Julienne Baronda.

Also named were incumbent Vice Mayor Victor Facultad and Councilors Joshua Alim, Erlinda Liberiaga, Ramon Cua Locsin, Marietta Locsin and Ma. Rita Sarabia, who also belonged to the previous city council but was re-elected in 2001.

The Ombudsman-Visayas also recommended the inclusion of Mario Caoyonan, Ely Bagtasus, Nilo Moralidad, Julianito Ortigas and Rey Asuncion, who were members of the city's pre-qualification, bids and awards Committee (PBAC), in the graft charges.

Together with Trenas, city administrator Melchor Tan, city engineer Edwin Bravo and city treasurer Katherine Tingson, were to be charged with graft.

The 413-unit housing project, which was intended for city government employees, stands at the city-owned lot at Barangay Ungka, in the adjoining town of Pavia, 9 km from here.

It was built by funds from bonds floated by the city government. The Malabor administration approved the project and the implementation was continued by Trenas.

The work at the housing project site was stopped pending the resolution of the issue. But Trenas said there were talks between the city and main contractor, Ace Builders Enterprises (ABE), to continue with the project, with Ace "correcting the substandard materials."

In its evaluation report dated Oct. 20, the Ombudsman-Visayas found several irregularities in the housing project.

These were the use of substandard materials, the design and construction approach made by the contractor contributed to the use of substandard materials, the bidding violated rules and the contract was not valid.

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INQUIRER Southern Luzon

Editor Jun Bandayrel
Bureau Chief Floreño G. Solmirano

Subdivision kids learn from mini-zoo

By Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
Lucena City

BOTHERED by the realization that his own family have seen more exotic animals abroad but not those from the Philippines, a real estate developer and environmentalist in Lucena City has committed himself to a venture that aims to correct, if not balance, the situation.

Proceso Alcala, 48, a civil engineer and president of Cotta Realty and Development Corp. (CRDC), recalled that during one of their family gatherings, he realized that most young members of the clan never had the opportunity to interact with Philippine wildlife species.

A true-blooded environmentalist and protector of wild animals, Alcala admitted that the occasion jolted him into action. After all, he is a board official of the environmental protection group Tanggol-Kalikasan.

"Here I am, I can afford to bring my children to foreign lands and enjoy theme parks with different animals there. And yet, they don't know how our local wildlife looks like, except in pictures," he said.

A father of three and a future grandfather, Alcala also noted that most of today's youth were avid viewers of foreign television channels that mostly featured wild animals.

"Although it's a good educational program, they've been missing equally exciting homegrown species," he said.

Alcala, a member of the Rotary Club, the Subdivision and Housing Developers Association, and the Quezon Chamber of Commerce and Industry, keeps a young crocodile that roams freely inside his office.

Three years ago, he transformed a 2,600-sq.-m lot in his 33-hectare subdivision in Barangay Ibabang Dupay, locally known as Saint Jude Satellite City, into a "Bird Park," especially designed for endangered bird species.

Cluster-villages

The subdivision is composed of five cluster-villages. Arranged inside the premises that closely resemble a mini-zoo are at least 45 wide steel cages covered with lush vegetation.

Inside the steel structures are 65 wildlife species, mostly exotic birds from Philippine forests, such as hornbills, sea eagles, crested serpent eagles, falcons, bleeding heart pigeons, fruit-eating bats, green imperial doves, wild ducks from Philippine swamps, and more feathered species.

ALCALA plays with a hornbill in his mini-zoo in Lucena City. DELFIN T. MALLARI JR.

Park visitors, especially children, can interact with the different kinds of fowls wandering in the premises.

"They can touch and play with the animals, but feeding them is strictly prohibited. We don't want to jeopardize the health and safety of our wards," Alcala said.

The park area has trails of concrete walkways, fenced off on both sides with nylon ropes.

It has several endangered forest animals, such as wild pigs with piglets; a couple of Philippine mouse deer [the smallest deer in the world] and their newly born offspring; the Palawan squirrel, pythons, iguanas and monkeys, which are only seen in textbooks or at the Manila Zoo.

At the center of the park are man-made lagoons teeming with colorful aquarium fish of various sizes.

"The original concept is that this park will be for local animal species only. But most of our young visitors also look for foreign ones. So we decided to also adopt some imported variety. But the focus still remains that this park is for the enhancement of local species," Alcala explained.

Donations

"Some of the animal species were donations from well-meaning individuals who also share my goal of renewing the interest of the young generation in Philippine wildlife and making the children realize that most of the animals need protection because they are nearing extinction," he said.

Alcala, this year's Quezon Medalya ng Karangalan awardee for environmental protection, boasted that his subdivision's bird park is the first in the country. The facility, he said, was registered with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

One of the maintenance helpers said different kinds of birds congregate in the area as dusk set in.

The DENR has provided bits of information about the birds, such as their scientific names and natural habitats, which are posted on iron sheets attached to the cages.

The Saint Jude Satellite City has struck a deal with the management of the newly built SM-Lucena, giving access road to the mall's patrons right at the back of the mall parking area.

"Thus, more children have been visiting the bird park after shopping," Alcala said.

Two more parks will be constructed in the two other villages inside the Saint Jude Satellite City, he said. The "aquatic" and "reptile" theme parks are already in the planning stage, he said.

Open spaces

The parks will also occupy the government-required open space for the other two village-clusters. The remaining two open spaces will be the site for the community chapel and playground.

According to the park crew, the daily food for the fish alone consists of at least P200 worth of floating pellets; for some of the birds, at least 70 live ducklings; and about 30 kilos of assorted fish, feeds and cereals.

"Putting up and maintaining this park is really expensive. But the inner joy that I feel inside, knowing that this place has contributed to the child's learning process about the fragile condition of Philippine wildlife, is enough compensation for me," he said.

The list of recent visitors includes 27 jeeploads of parents and daycare students from Dolores town, more than a thousand Girl Scouts from Atimonan, Quezon, and several more groups of excited children.

"Teachers from the local elementary schools and those from the neighboring towns have included the park as one of the educational sites for their students. We would soon require visitors in groups to schedule their tour for better appreciation of the park," he said.

Research on the animal species is also encouraged, he said. The bird park has its own set of guards and maintenance workers.

A new toilet for visitors has been built on one side of the covered entrance, which also doubles as a briefing area.

A reserved space has been allotted for the proposed store that will sell park souvenirs.

Alcala said he would try to release some of animals, like the mouse deer, in the protected area of Mt. Banahaw. "We hope they will adapt to their new surroundings but if not, we will return them to their natural habitat."

Journalist rewrites Naga history

By Alan Pelayo
Naga City

FOR THE first time in 55 years, Naga City did not celebrate its charter anniversary on Dec. 15 because, according to a local newspapermen, the date was a "historical error."

Jose Fernando P. Obias pointed out the mistake in an investigative article published in 2001. He wrote that the Dec. 15 celebration of Charter Day had much to be desired as far as accuracy and historical research were concerned.

Obias, publisher-editor in chief of local newsmagazine The Paper, said that June 18, 1948 was actually the date when the Charter of Naga, created by Republic Act No. 305, was approved by then President Elpidio Quirino. Thus, he said, the correct Charter Day was June 18, not Dec. 15.

He cited Section 91, Article 16 of RA 305, which stated that the act should take effect upon approval, that is, on June 18, 1948.

Why the error? And how come all past city officials had been celebrating Charter Day on Dec. 15, instead of June 18?

One reason is that when the first set of city officials were appointed, they focused their attention on their inauguration on Dec. 15, Obias said. "They were nonexistent then as of June 18, 1948. It was only after Quirino approved the Charter that the vacancies in the offices created by the Charter of the new city government of Naga became existent ... "

As prescribed by its newly approved charter, Naga had to come up with its first city officials so that the President could appoint them, he said. Obias contended that Dec. 15, 1948 was the day when the first city mayor, vice mayor and members of the council were sworn into office.

No other event was more significant that year than the swearing in of the officials, he said. "It was a day when the authors of the bill creating the Charter of Naga City came to visit their fellow Bikolanos—Sen. Vicente Madrigal and Rep. Juan Q. Miranda."

Jose Surtida, judge of the Court of First Instance in Camarines Sur, swore into office Leon Sa. Aureus as the first mayor in ceremonies held at the plaza.

Independence

Another factor that led to the establishment of Dec. 15 as Charter Day, according to Obias, was the Independence Day ceremonies in Luneta, Manila, on July 4, 1946. The event gave the impression that as President Manuel Roxas was sworn in, the nation marked its independence from the United States, he said.

Thus, he said, the swearing in of the first city officials of Naga could also be viewed as Charter Day.

As if to legitimize the "historical error," the city council in 1991 even passed Ordinance No. 91-095 providing for a joint celebration of Naga and the Parish of St. John the Evangelist in making the charter on Dec. 15.

In passing the ordinance, Obias said, the council did not consider the date when the charter was signed into law. At the very least, the ordinance was bereft of any historical research, he said.

Obias saw a "political undertone" in the approval of the ordinance. "It sought to get the good graces of the Catholic Church in Naga to take the cause of the city officials since the ordinance gave the impression that these city officials would like to establish and exercise close ties with the Caceres clergy."

Convinced

On May 21, 2001, convinced that there was an error in the date of the charter celebration, Obias wrote the city council that "there is no historical basis" for the city to mark Charter Day on Dec. 15.

On June 14, 2001, the council called for a committee hearing on the issue and later set a public hearing on June 29, 2001.

The National Historical Institute also intervened, informing the local officials about the "historical error."

Councilor Cecilia De Asis, chair of the committee on culture and arts, brought the question to the attention of Camarines Sur Rep. Sulpicio S. Roco (second district), who, in turn, filed a bill in Congress to rectify the error.

One of the documents submitted by Obias to the committee was an article of prominent Bicolano historian Danilo M. Gerona, titled "The Making of the Charter of Naga City," which affirmed his researches.

Gerona wrote that on June 18, 1948, while in the presence of Madrigal Miranda, Secretary Mariano Garchitorena, Representatives Toribio Perez and Tomas Clemente, and lawyer Antonio Ojeda, House Bill 1255, sponsored by Miranda, was signed by Quirino into law.

He said this came to be known as RA 305, which formally gave Naga its charter.

Six months after the bill was passed, Gerona said, the newly created city was inaugurated on Dec. 15, 1948 with Aureus, a former guerrilla officer, as the first appointed mayor.

On June 18, Naga celebrated its new Charter Day.

Last year, Obias was given an award for "Outstanding Investigative Article" by the prestigious St. Peter Baptist Catholic Mass Media Awards of the Archdiocese of Caceres for his researches.

Sculptor finds beauty in Mayon rocks

By Gil Francis G. Arevalo
Legazpi City

THE rocks that Mayon Volcano expels when it erupts have become a blessing to people who have made use of their talents to produce things of beauty and function.

Among these creative persons is a Bicolano named Ely Benito, 49, who sculpted and painted several landmarks in Albay and Sorsogon that earned him the moniker "oragon artist."

"Making sculpture [pieces] out of volcanic rocks is very hard. It takes a lot of thinking and maneuvering before [one] can decide a design or image out of it. This kind of rock requires a lot of attention," said the self-taught Benito, who finished only high school.

But the result is rewarding, he said.

"When I was assigned to Camp Simeon Ola to do sculpture works, a group of people told me: *Mabuti ka pa, kami, pera na naging bato pa! Ikaw, bato ginagawa mong pera* (You're better off; for us, money turns into stone! You make money out of stone)," Benito said.

The artist has also built monuments and made carvings of religious images for churches throughout Bicol.

ONE of Ely Benito's masterpieces. NIÑO JESUS ORBETA

"I haven't received any award, but I'm very proud that almost all of my works have become landmarks in this region, and some people from other parts of the country have appreciated this kind of art. They were able to feel some cultural and historical bits of Bicol," Benito said.

A member of the Art Association of the Philippines and the Center for Bicol Arts Foundation, Benito sculpted the statue of revolutionary hero Gen. Simeon Ola mounted on a horse. The piece was erected at the gate of the camp bearing his name, which houses the regional headquarters of the Philippine National Police and other units of the military.

Benito also made the Daragang Mayon in Buang, Tabaco City, and the Miguel Lopez de Legazpi Monument at Legazpi's City Hall compound.

Benito's achievements have inspired other promising young artists in the region.

"It motivates me more to create art that serves as a good image of who and what we Bicolanos are. That, too, will be my legacy to the next generation," Benito said.

METROBRIEFS

Slay suspects held

TWO SUSPECTS in the killing of police asset Teresita Silverio in Manila have been arrested by operatives of the Western Police District. The suspects, identified as Serafin Catindoy, 28, and Wilfredo Valera, 29, have been identified by witnesses as among those who entered Silverio's home on the night she was killed. Police said the suspects were nabbed in separate occasions. Catindoy was one of those who stabbed Silverio himself, police said. *Leila Salaverria*

Guard shot

A SECURITY guard was shot when he fought off two men who allegedly tried to rob an internet cafe Tuesday night. Investigation showed that Avelino Tacdoro, 49, resisted when the suspects tried to grab his shotgun upon entering the Cross Road internet cafe on Angel Linao Street in San Andres, Manila, around 11 p.m. The suspects then shot Tacdoro and fled with the guard's shotgun. One of the suspects, however, identified as Jonas Antonio, was arrested by responding policemen. Tacdoro was brought to a hospital. He will live. *Leila Salaverria*

Close shave

A TRAFFIC enforcer of the Metro Manila Development Authority had a close brush with death the other night in front of the SM Megamall in Mandaluyong City. TE2 Joebert Panes, 26, of Pacita Complex, San Pedro, Laguna, was trying to stop a bus which had stayed too long in the dispatching area when the driver stepped on the gas. The driver, identified as Jay Bautista, 34, of Jell Transport, reportedly got irked at Panes' insistence fur him to move on. Panes luckily stepped aside and avoided being hit. *Luige del Puerto*

De Mesa; 48

RENE (Teng) de la Cruz de Mesa of Jose Panganiban, Camarines Norte, and Cainta, Rizal, joined his Creator last Dec. 15 at the age of 48. He is survived by his wife, Jean, daughters Jeramel, Bea and Rio. His body lies at the Holy Trinity Chapel, Sucat, Parañaque. Interment will be held on Saturday, Dec. 20, at 10 a.m. at the Manila Memorial Park, Sucat, Parañaque.

New shabu warehouse found

By Christian Esguerra

POLICE yesterday stormed a warehouse in Guiguinto, Bulacan, which yielded at least P40 million worth of chemicals which could be used in manufacturing shabu.

Chief Supt. Vidal Querol, Central Luzon police director, said the warehouse along the McArthur Highway and located near Ismael restaurant in Barangay Tabang was being used as a storehouse by a drug syndicate.

The syndicate, whose operations the police have been dismantling over the past weeks, reportedly stacked up shabu ingredients and equipment it had saved from previous raids in its facilities in Metro Manila.

A certain Yolly, who neighbors claimed was renting the warehouse, was arrested and detained by the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG).

Supt. Arnold Gunnacao, Bulacan police intelligence and investigation officer, said they seized 46 crates, each of which contained four gallons of the liquid labelled "0chemical."

Querol said they had been told by an informant in Bulacan about the presence of shabu-making chemicals there.

The raid followed the raid on a "satellite" shabu laboratory in nearby Barangay Tiaong several days earlier.

Police seized at least P20 million worth of shabu and chemicals and equipment used in making shabu in that operation.

Senior Supt. Felizardo Serapio Jr., Bulacan police director, said residents in Barangay Tabang told the police that the warehouse's operation stopped after the shabu laboratory in Tiaong was raided.

At the same time, police officials said, the Guiguinto facilities were used by drug ring that operated the shabu "factories" in Antipolo and Pasig which were dismantled by the police last month.

With Carmela Reyes, PDI Central Luzon Desk

Lacson asking concessions from FPJ

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

MY SPY inside the camp of Sen. Panfilo Lacson says that he's asking for several concessions from actor Fernando Poe Jr. for him to give way to Poe. The two are seeking the presidential nomination under the banner of the united opposition.

What are those concessions?

That should FPJ win, Lacson would handpick the leaders of the following government agencies: Department of Interior and Local Government, Philippine National Police (PNP), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Department of Budget Management (DBM) and Department of Justice.

If Lacson were to be given all those concessions, he would be the de facto chief executive even if FPJ were elected President.

* * *

I remember the time Roberto Lastimoso was PNP chief.

Lastimoso was PNP chief in name only. Lacson was the power behind the throne.

Lastimoso's rank was the equivalent of that of a four-star general while Lacson only had two stars at that time. But Lacson was dictating what Lastimoso should do, especially in designating people to key positions in the PNP. Ping was President Erap's little commander in chief at the PNP as well as the Armed Forces.

That's Lacson. He wants to have his cake and eat it, too.

* * *

You wouldn't want to be in the shoes of Zamboanga City millionaire-businessman Lepeng Wee because of the problems he's been having lately.

The Bureau of Customs is pursuing the criminal charges filed against him for alleged smuggling of illegal drugs. Former presidential adviser Robert Aventajado has dragged Wee's name into the mud in the Sipadan hostages negotiations in an obvious attempt by Aventajado to cover his wrongdoing.

On top of those problems, Wee is having unnecessary legal squabbles with his brother, Leheung, my other good friend, about the management of the seaweed/carageenan processing plants in the country.

* * *

Brothers Lepeng and Leheung Wee practically control the seaweed export market which, if handled correctly, is our next billion-dollar industry. Carageenan may yet take the place that sugar and coconut occupied many years ago.

But the brothers are having a misunderstanding over their business empire.

Their squabble is not being helped by Lepeng's lawyer, Antonio Angeles. He's been giving his client the worst possible kind of legal advice. The kind of legal maneuverings suggested by Angeles are like poisonous medicine given to a sick patient.

Angeles doesn't want Lepeng to have an out-of court settlement with his brother.

* * *

Lepeng should have fired Angeles months ago for bungling his drug smuggling charge. I had implicitly suggested he did that.

Wee was cleared of the smuggling case by then Justice Secretary Hernando Perez last year. Having personal knowledge about the case, I had convinced Perez that it was filed upon the prodding of his erstwhile political enemy, the powerful Lobregat family of Zamboanga City.

I told Lepeng that lawyer Angeles must guard against the case being re-filed after Perez had cleared him.

But Angeles either didn't know what to do or he was complacent. Now the case has come back to haunt the controversial businessman again.

Moral of the story: If you have a criminal case, get a lawyer who knows his law.

Quick response team set up to secure malls

By Margaux Ortiz

THE CONTINUING terrorist threat in the metropolis has paved the way for the formation of a task force which will act as the immediate response and coordinating unit in strategic commercial centers in Metro Manila.

Supt. Caesar Felix, designated commander of Task Force for the Security of Critical Infrastructure (TFSCI) on strategic commercial centers for Metro Manila, told the Inquirer that the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority will be the grouptask force's lead agency.

Felix said the MMDA task force will serve as the coordinator and main response unit in case of any untoward incident in commercial centers "in view of the continuing Jemaah Islamiyah threat in the metropolis with the ending of Ramadan and the beginning of the Christmas season."

Felix said the MMDA met yesterday with the security officers of malls, representatives of local government units including the police, and hospital trauma unit heads to discuss and formulate a system which will ensure a faster and more efficient way of going about emergency situations like bombings and fire.

During the meeting, Felix said they have identified hospitals and strategic installations like police and fire stations and have assessed their capability to respond to emergencies.

With the newly formulated system, the MMDA task force would receive information on terrorist threats or attacks on malls through local officials and respond by contacting the agencies or people needed.

Water cutoff in Navotas

PORTIONS of Navotas will have no water for 16 hours starting 6 a.m., Saturday, Dec. 20, 2003 up to 10 p.m. of the following day.

Maynilad will be working on a 600-mm mainline along Northbay Boulevard near the Maralla Bridge.

To have no water are: Brgy. Bangkulasi, Navotas Fish Port and the whole of Northbay Blvd. In the meantime, Kapitbahayan Village (Phase I), San Rafael Village, and Bagumbayan (South) will have low pressure to no water.

HALF A CENTURY OF EDUCATING THE FILIPINO YOUTH: THE QUEZON CITY ACADEMY WAY

Message from the Chairman

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of Quezon City Academy, it is most gratifying to look back to our very humble beginnings to see where we came from, what we sought to do and where we are now and what we have achieved.

Originally started in 1953, the school was envisioned by its founding fathers to be a school which would produce high school graduates imbued with proper academic training, discipline and strong sense of values which would fortify them for the world of higher studies and which would give them a solid life-long foundation in good citizenship and in leadership.This served as the vision and guiding principle of the late Justice and Mrs. Carmelino G. Alvendia, as they nurtured the school from its incipient years to maturity.

Today, we see the achievements of Quezon City Academy and we are proud of her accomplishments: a disciplined and most active studentry, a progressive faculty, an enlightened administration, modern facilities, processes and buildings, and lastly, the successful alumni in various sectors of society. For Quezon City Academy is a school with a soul, committed to the development and upliftment of the Filipino, whether he be the student, the teacher, administrator or alumnus, whatever be his station in life, and in whatever field he is in.

And so today, as we celebrate our Foundation Day, I, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, would like to pay tribute to our President, Mr. Tomas C. Ongoco and all the numerous men and women who have helped make Quezon City Academy the vibrant institution that it is today.

I especially thank the Almighty for His Divine Guidance which has helped our institution weather the storms and trials through the years and which has steered our ship to safe grounds, bringing His children to new frontiers and greener pastures.

CARMELINO P. ALVENDIA JR.
Chairman, Board of Trustees

Half a century ago, Justice Carmelino G. Alvendia took over the administration of the Quezon City Academy (QCA), and started the transformation of an old school in its chronic stage of decay to what is now the modern QCA, providing quality education and developing leaders capable of meeting the challenges of global competition.

From the school's humble beginnings, QCA's hallowed halls now inspire learning, critical thinking, communication, leadership skills and nationalism. These skills are what the QCA student is made of.

A class in QCA, for example is currently collaborating on-line (through the Internet) with a class of Patrick Henry High School in San Diego California, USA. This collaboration has led to the studies on human psychology/development & family sociology where special emphasis is given to global cultures. The QCA also has a program of networking with elementary schools in Quezon City to drum up the value of concern for others particularly the economically and socially challenged. Philippine Normal University entrusts its students' practicum work in QCA. The Academy has a nature trail area in Cavinti, Laguna - in Lake Lumot - and nurtures a sistership tie-up with the rural Lumot High School.

So what makes QCA special? Is it because of the administrators' visionary approach and foresight? Is it because of the plethora of information and communication technology tools and resources available to the school's faculty and students? Is it because of the student's gung-ho attitude towards learning? Or is it the community and educational partners' support to the school's projects and programs? It's all these and more.

Ask Mrs. Vivien Riano, QCA's principal, and she'll tell you that simply put, QCA is devoted to the development of the Filipino youth. And the QCA students agree. It is this devotion that makes them strive harder to become proud members of the QCA family and become future leaders of the Filipino nation. As Katrina Francia and April Maglaque, graduating students profess, "I-M-P-R-E-S-S-I-V-E spells out QCA's progress". Like many of their classmates, Katrina and April believe that QCA has been true to its promise of quality education to them. They hope that the school will continuously produce "fruitful students that carry the school's golden laurels wherever they may be".

However, QCA's mission is far from over. As Mrs. Manya Alvendia-Rodriquez, Finance Officer of QCA aptly puts it, "The school must be able to turn out batches upon batches of student leaders who are not just intellectuals and tech-savvy individuals but well-learned in moral and spiritual values so that they can bring these skills and values to wherever they go and contribute to the building of a new Filipino community who care for and fear God, not men".

Indeed, QCA today is thriving and making good the promise of the school's owners, the Alvendias. QCA's President Tomas Ongoco and the rest of the school administration will work even harder to ensure that QCA will persist in delivering the future of education through community oriented programs, unique teaching methods, technological innovations, and leadership practices that continue to make a difference in the shaping of the Filipino youth.

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(In exact order)

SUERTRES
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MEGALOTTO 6/45
5 22 26 31 38 45

FIRE CHIEF ISSUE

Lina orders probe

By Nelson Flores

SETTING aside the complaint and recommendation of Metropolitan Manila Development Authority Chair Bayani Fernando, Interior and Local Government Secretary Jose Lina Jr. yesterday ordered an investigation into the alleged inefficiency and laziness of some Quezon City and Manila firemen.

Lina said Fernando's claims should be investigated first before any action is taken. He tasked his undersecretary for peace and order Marius Corpus to look into the matter.

The MMDA chair said he already sent to Lina his recommendation to sack QC Fire Marshall Oscar Villegas and San Lazaro fire station chief Teofilo Castillo for not doing their jobs properly during a fire in Cubao Tuesday.

"In a scale of 1 to 10, I'm giving them a meager 2," said Fernando who sits as head of the Disaster Coordinating Council in Metro Manila. *With Margaux Ortiz*

ANTI-VENDING DRIVE

Two police chiefs get ax

By Tarra Quismundo and Leila Salaverria

THIS is what happens when a mayor gets caught in traffic.

Western Police District director Pedro Bulaong yesterday sacked Station 11 chief Bernardo Diaz and added that Juan Luna Street precinct director Insp. Rolando Basmayor would soon follow.

Manila Mayor Joselito Atienza Jr. yesterday recommended the relief of the two officials after he was bogged down in traffic on his way to Binondo.

"I have recommended that they be removed today, because they failed to keep Juan Luna Street clear of vendors," Atienza later said during the Manila Business Summit at the Manila Hotel.

Atienza was on an unplanned visit to Juan Luna at about 10 a.m., when he saw vendors already occupying the sidewalks leading to Divisoria, causing heavy traffic.

He was on his way to a gift-giving activity in Binondo, when he was caught in traffic on Jones Bridge.

The mayor had declared Ilaya and Juan Luna streets as no vending zones to clear the way for vehicles going to Divisoria.

Vendors are only allowed in designated areas in Blumentritt and Carriedo streets and Claro M. Recto Avenue, where they can rent stalls for P20 a day.

Supt. Segundo Duran took over the reigns of Station 11 less than a month after Diaz was appointed to the post.

Bulaong said Basmayor would be replaced by either SPO4 Nestor Sun or SPO4 Abdon Pascual.

Xmas lures pols

By Edson Tandoc Jr.

STREAMERS abound and come in all colors and sizes. But they serve one purpose: Give political aspirants early campaign mileage during the Christmas season.

The hopefuls for both national and local posts all wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, but their names and pictures are printed in bigger letters than their greetings.

And for the family of Danny Cruz who is into the business of making streamers, this is indeed a season to be jolly.

He and his wife Amparo have been in the streamer printing business since they married 27 years ago.

When the Christmas season set in, orders also started pouring in.

Their prices range from P175 to P225 per streamer.

The family's most recent project was for a lawyer-radio announcer in Malabon City.

LRT 2 to roll in '04

SWEATING it out in traffic from Pasig to Manila may be over in April 2004.

The Light Rail Transit Authority (LRTA) tested yesterday the run of its Line 2 from Pasig to V. Mapa Street in Manila with President Macapagal Arroyo witnessing the event.

Ms Macapagal rode through five stations: Araneta Center-Cubao, Betty Go-Belmonte, Gilmore, J. Ruiz and V. Mapa.

"The test run shows that by middle of next year, the public will have less travel time," Arroyo said.

LRTA administrator Teddy Cruz said the 8.76-kilometer ride from Pasig City to V. Mapa would take 20 minutes.

Barring further delays, the entire line that goes all the way to C.M. Recto in Manila is expected to be running by December 2004.

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3-YEAR CONTRACT

Alaska keeps Peek for ₱12.6M

By June Navarro

ALI Peek is now at the pinnacle of his career in the Philippine Basketball Association.

The Alaska Aces took note of that fact yesterday when they signed the beefy, 6-foot-4 power forward to a lucrative, three-year contract worth roughly P12.6 million exclusive of bonuses.

"No pun intended but I think Ali (Peek) is at the peak of his career so we didn't think twice in signing him up," said Alaska team manager Joaqui Trillo, stressing that Peek would receive the maximum monthly salary of P350,000 until 2006.

. The PBA Board of Governors drastically lowered the maximum monthly wage from P500,000 down to P350,000 last season, citing the financial crisis that hit the league in recent years.

An intimidating force in the shaded area, Peek was sidelined for more than three weeks during the elimination round and the playoffs of the Reinforced Conference after bone chips and fluids were removed from his left knee.

Peek's recurring knee injury had prevented him from playing for the all-PBA national basketball team during the Busan Asian Games last year.

But after his surgery almost two months ago, doctors have assured the Aces that Peek will soon be in peak form.

Trillo said the Aces have also renewed the contract of sophomore playmaker Stephen Padilla, who will don the Alaska jersey for the next two seasons. Trillo, however, declined to divulge the amount of the pact.

Trillo said negotiations with John Arigo are still underway while the fate of Migs Noble, Richard Del Rosario, Jon Ordonio and Alvin Castro would be known prior to the rookie draft next month.

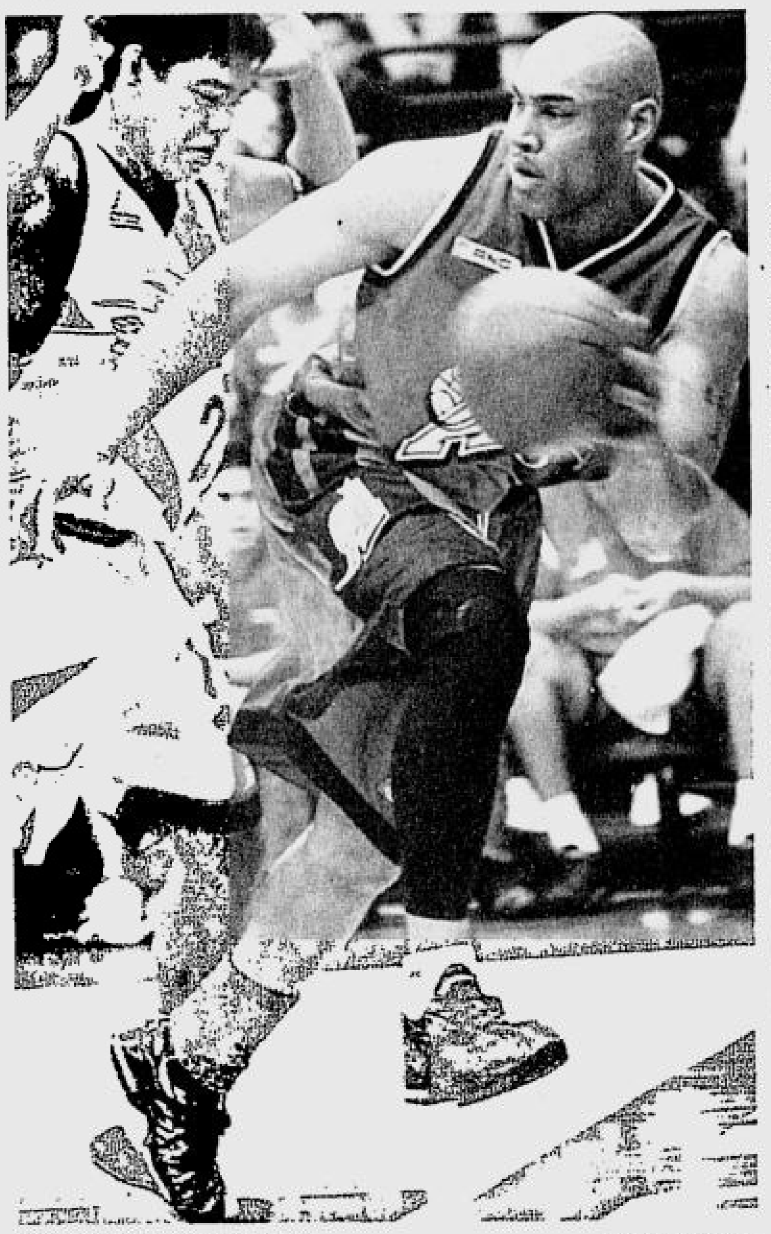
Peek, who was named to the 2001 PBA Mythical Selection, was selected third overall by the now defunct Pop Cola in 1997 before being shipped to the Aces in the middle of the 2000 season.

Padilla, a three-point specialist from Cebu, was drafted by the Aces last season after toiling in the Metropolitan Basketball Association's Cebu Gems for three years.

Trillo said the Aces and their families will spend the holidays in Australia as their bonus for winning the Asian Invitationals during the second conference.

Meanwhile, Formula Shell power forward Anthony Dela Cruz has been named the first recipient of the First Gentleman Sportsman of the Year award—an honor given to the PBA player who has contributed immensely in enhancing the league's image and strengthening its links with the fans.

ALASKA/ A20



PEEK (right): Lucrative deal

AUGUST DELA CRUZ

SPORTS TV

Compiled by L. Manguiat

BASKETBALL: NBA - Raptors vs Spurs; 9:30 a.m. (r- 10 p.m.); Solar Sports; Rockets vs Cavs; 7 p.m.; IBC 13—A revitalized Toronto squad takes on a struggling San Antonio team while last year's number one pick Yao Ming faces this year's top selection LeBron James as Houston clashes with Cleveland.

NBA Greatest Games - Pacers vs Knicks, Game 3, 1999 Eastern Finals; 12 noon; Solar Sports—Relive one of the most memorable postseason encounters between bitter rivals Indiana and New York.

Schedules subject to change without prior notice

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MANILA SEA GAMES

Dayrit lobbies for choice events

By Marc Anthony Reyes

WITH THE lessons learned from Vietnam, the Philippine Olympic Committee will be lobbying hard for the 2005 Manila Southeast Asian Games to include sports where the country has strong chances of winning.

POC president Celso Dayrit said the tentative list of sports in 2005 will be discussed during a SEA Games Federation meeting to be hosted by Manila in March where the Philippines, as host country, can start fighting for events that would help boost its bid to finally nail the overall championship.

The country finished fourth overall after landing 48 gold medals in the Vietnam SEAG, which the host country dominated by, among others, introducing new sports like shuttlecock, fin swimming, petanque and hand ball.

"In 2005, we will be considering the number of golds we can win as much as the number of golds we are going to give away," Dayrit explained.

He said if the country could win two to three golds in a certain sport, but Thailand or Indonesia stand to win more than we expect to do, then the Philippines might as well exclude that sport.

"Vietnam handled that point very well," Dayrit added.

Starting in 2005, Dayrit said the SEAG Federation will provide a permanent set of sports disciplines to be followed by all 11 member-nations of the federation.

However, the host can still introduce certain sports disciplines that must be within the regulations imposed by their respective world governing bodies to preclude the possibility of abuse.

Dayrit has earlier said the country will restore golf and bowling, two events that were scrapped in Vietnam. Also expected to make the Manila SEAG roster of events are ballroom dancing and additional events in billiards.

Dayrit said the country was fortunate that the gold medals harvested by Vietnam came from events where Malaysia and Indonesia were banking on. "They didn't take medals from 'our' events," he said.

Thailand finished second overall followed by Indonesia. Malaysia, overall winner in 2001, wound up fifth behind the Philippines.

DAYRIT

Iverson out due to swollen knee

PHILADELPHIA—Allen Iverson could be sidelined until January with a swollen right knee and wishes the Philadelphia 76ers would put him on the injured list.

The NBA's leading scorer has missed two of the team's last three games and said Tuesday he thinks he'll miss the 76ers' West Coast road trip that starts Dec. 26 at the Los Angeles Clippers.

The 76ers play four games before then, starting Wednesday at home against the Miami Heat.

"I don't want to go out West if I'm not able to play. The only thing that's going to do is bother me," Iverson said. "One day, I'll wake up and feel a little better and try and go out there and play, and that might not be the best thing."

Asked whether team doctors have let him know when his knee will be healed, Iverson said: "They can't tell me. Nobody's been able to tell me how long it's going to take."

He's averaging 28.9 points, 6.1 assists and 3.8 rebounds for the Atlantic Division-leading 76ers (12-12). He also is playing 43.7 minutes per game.

"We're not going to jeopardize his long-term career," coach Randy Ayers said. "We won't play him until he feels healthy enough to play, and I think you have to let players make that decision. We'll wait to see when he feels right."

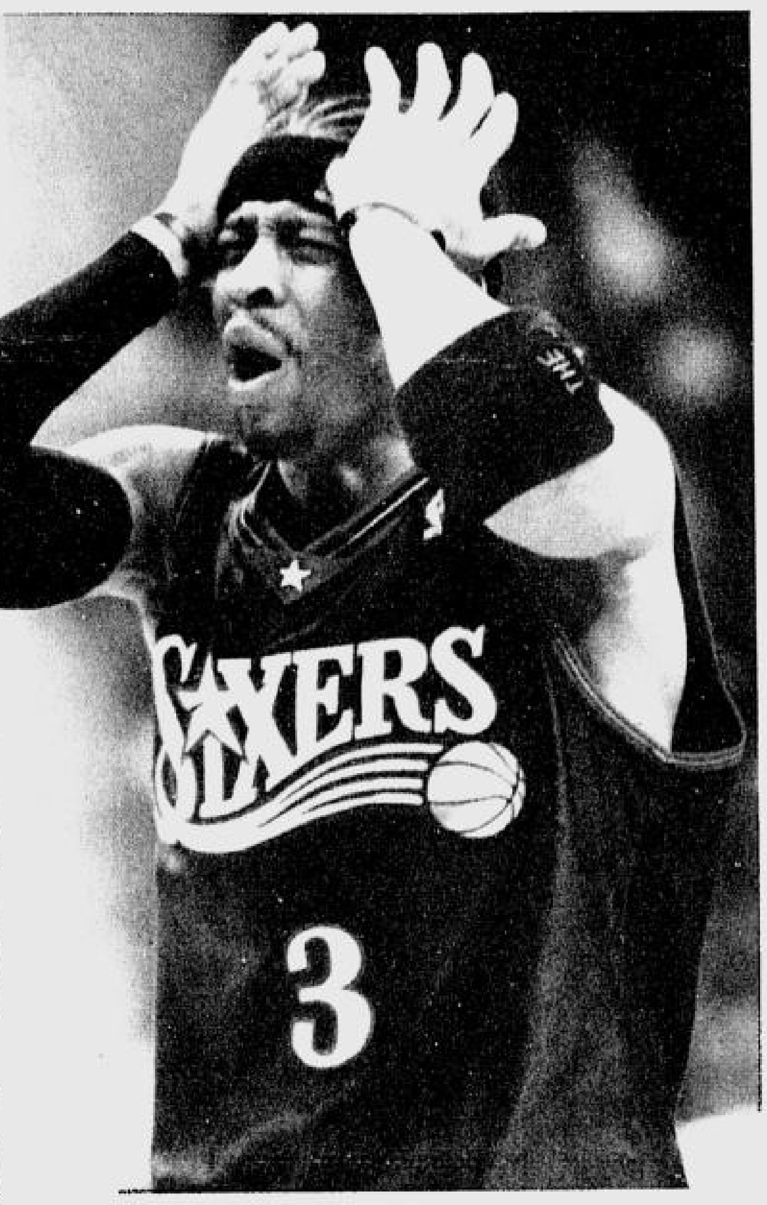
Iverson was hurt in a game against Chicago on Dec. 4, when he slipped and hit the court hard. Iverson finished the game but said the knee started to swell on the plane and has bothered him since.

He played 44 minutes the next night against Miami, sat out a game against Detroit, then returned to shoot 6-for-22 from the floor in 44 minutes against Denver on Friday.

"I honestly wish they could put me on the injured list so when I come to the games, I don't try to go out there and play. They tell me they don't have any room," Iverson said at practice.

"I'm not in a lot of pain. I'm not able to move like I want to move."

Philadelphia lists Iverson's status as day-to-day. He played all 82 games for the first time in his career last season. *AP*



IVERSON wants to be on the injured list. REUTERS

NBA ROUNDUP

Heat down Hawks, post 4th straight win

MIAMI—Rookie Dwayne Wade shot 15-for-22 and had 32 points and nine assists, Tuesday, leading the Miami Heat to their fourth straight victory, 97-79, over the Atlanta Hawks.

Eddie Jones added 22 points and Lamar Odom had his fourth straight double-double with 19 points and 12 rebounds. All of Odom's rebounds were on the defensive end.

The four-game winning streak is Miami's first since March 2002.

"We're on a roll right now," Odom said. "Four wins is not enough, hopefully we can take it to five."

Odom's 3-pointer with 6:54 remaining in the third quarter put the Heat ahead, 65-55. The Hawks never got their deficit into single digits the rest of the way.

"The guys are playing great and we haven't even had Caron (Butler) playing the way everyone knows he can play," Wade said. "So we're very excited and we feel we can play this way the rest of the year."

Shareef Abdur-Rahim led the Hawks with 16 points. Atlanta has lost four successive games and eight of its last nine.

In Washington, Larry Hughes scored 20 of his season-high 38 points in the fourth quarter, and Etan Thomas blocked a potential game-tying layup by Andrei Kirilenko as Washington beat Utah, 91-87.

The victory broke a four-game losing streak for the Wizards, who are turning to Hughes more and more with Gilbert Arenas and Jerry Stackhouse sidelined with long-term injuries.

Hughes shot early and often, making 10 of 21 field goals, including four 3-pointers, and 14 of 16 freethrows.

Kirilenko had 17 points and eight rebounds for the Jazz, who are 1-1 thus far on a six-game road trip.

In New York, Jason Richardson scored 26 points in a lopsided game as Golden State downed New York, 104-86.

The Warriors snapped a two-game losing streak by running all over the Knicks, scoring 23 fast-break points and never being threatened in the second half.

Speedy Claxton added 14 points and six assists, and Mike Dunleavy had 10 points, nine rebounds and four assists, and Nick Van Exel and Calbert Cheaney scored 13 apiece. *AP*

Complete results:

Washington 91, Utah 87; Miami 97, Atlanta 79; Golden State 104, New York 86; Memphis 105, Sacramento 100; Minnesota 92, Houston 75; Chicago 102, Orlando 88; Phoenix 92, Seattle 91 (OT); Denver 116, New Orleans 94; Milwaukee 106, Portland 99.

Welcoat seeks 1st semifinals slot

GAMES TODAY
(Pasig Sports Center)
1:45 p.m.—Sunkist-UST
vs Montana Pawnshop
3:45 p.m.—Blustar Detergent
vs Welcoat Paint

BEFORE thinking of a grand Christmas vacation, defending champion Welcoat Paints wants to settle one pressing matter this early: secure the first semifinal berth.

That will be Welcoat's goal when the Paint Masters collide with the dangerous Blu Star Detergent today even as Sunkist-UST goes for a third straight win in the 2003 PBL Platinum Cup at the Pasig Sports Center.

Though they have beaten the Detergent Kings, 85-73, last Nov. 20, the Paint Masters are expected to encounter strong resistance this time.

For one, the Paint Masters did not have the luxury of practicing together for a long period as three of their stars—James Yap, Ervin Sotto and Marc Pingris—saw action for the National team in the just-concluded Vietnam SEA Games.

The Detergent Kings, on the other hand, are coming off a 71-67 win over Montaña Pawnshop last Tuesday despite horrible shooting from the field.

The Paint Masters and Detergent Kings clash at 3:45 p.m. in a game expected to be a battle of long bombs as both teams boast of dependable outside shooters.

STANDINGS	W	L
Welcoat	6	1
Blustar	5	3
Montana	4	3
Fash Liquid	4	3
Sunkist-UST	5	4
ICTSI	2	7
VIVA-FEU	1	6

With a 6-1 win-loss record, the Paint Masters are already assured of a playoff for the last semis berth but coach Leo Austria is determined to nail down the first semis berth today.

"It's better to get the first semis berth early," said Austria. "I just hope we can play with our old intensity."

The Tigers, riding the crest of another inspiring 69-63 win over ICTSI-La Salle also last Tuesday, take on the Jewels in the opening game at 1:45 with the España-based squad slightly tipped to prevail despite a 63-71 defeat to Montana in the first round.

The 6-foot-3 Yap, the most consistent scorer for the Nationals in the SEA Games, is again expected to entertain his legion of fans with his vast repertoire of shots and perhaps lead his team to another win.

Aside from Yap, Blu Star coach Leo Isaac has to find ways to stop Nelbert Omolon, who has been deadly in the team's previous three wins.

Alaska keeps Peek . . .

From page A19

The amiable three-year pro was picked from a list of nine players who stood out in the league's numerous outreach programs both in Metro Manila and out of town, and honored with the award created in conjunction with the First Gentleman Foundation of Mike Arroyo.

Dela Cruz was presented a trophy and a P100,000 check during Monday night's Leo Awards by presidential son Dato Arroyo, who represented his father during the well-attended rites at the Music Museum.

Dela Cruz, who narrowly lost out to Coca-Cola's Rafi Reavis in the race for this season's Most Improved Player plum, has been one of the most admired and respected players in the league--both for his blue-collar work ethic and his sportsmanship.

BECKHAM: One of Real Madrid's superstars. REUTERS

SOCCER YEAR-ENDER

Oil tycoon steals limelight from Beckham, other stars

LONDON—Forget Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane, David Beckham and Thierry Henry.

Soccer's biggest player in 2003 was Roman Abramovich.

The 37-year-old Russian oil tycoon, with a personal fortune of 5.5 billion pounds (US$9.46 billion), admits he knows little about the game and is more interested in ice hockey.

But his takeover of Chelsea—wiping out its reported debts of 80 million pounds (US$137.6 million) and then injecting another 120 million pounds (US$206.4 million) for the purchase of new players—turned the club from an also-ran to a serious contender in both England and Europe.

Abramovich is one of the so-called "oligarchs" who amassed great wealth after the fall of the Soviet Union. He speaks virtually no English and effectively lets his checkbook do the talking.

Thanks to Abramovich's cash, Chelsea manager Claudio Ranieri has been able to buy big—Hernan Crespo from Inter Milan, Juan Sebastian Veron from Manchester United, Adrian Mutu from Parma, Claude Makelele and Geremi from Real Madrid, Damien Duff from Blackburn Rovers and England internationals Joe Cole, Wayne Bridge and Glen Johnson.

With more money available when the transfer window opens at the end of the year, Chelsea officials have said they are in a position to add even more big names to an already huge squad.

All this has effectively made Abramovich, who bought the controlling interest in the Blues in early July, the most powerful man in club soccer.

His interest in Chelsea means the club can now outbid all others—Manchester United and Real Madrid included—in the race to land the top stars.

Ranieri, whose own job is under threat with Abramovich able to afford anyone in the game, tries to play down speculation about more big signings.

"How can I think about other players?" he said. "Now for me it's important to be focused about my players, my team. And then maybe I can ask Roman maybe it's better to change something."

If Ranieri doesn't buy again in the New Year, Chelsea fans will want to know why not.

The club has just one league title in its history—48 years ago—and was twice champion in the now defunct European Cup Winners Cup. But Chelsea has now made it to the top of the Premier League standings and advanced to the last 16 of the Champions League.

Chelsea could soon go head-to-head with nine-time winner Real Madrid or defending champion AC Milan, which clinched its sixth title by beating Juventus on penalties in May after a 0-0 tie at Old Trafford. *AP*

ABRAMOVICH: Lets his checkbook do the talking. AP

SPORTSWATCH

Tuñacao fails in elimination bout

FORMER International Boxing Organization (IBO) mini-flyweight champ Noel "The Eel" Tuñacao missed the chance to earn a crack at the International Boxing Federation (IBF) title after losing to Muhammad Rachman in an elimination bout in Makodam Jaya, Surabaya, Indonesia last Tuesday. Landing clear jabs and several hard blows, Tuñacao, older brother of ex-WBC fly champ Malcolm Tuñacao, was in total control of the first round and early in the second stanza. But Rachman, nicknamed "The Rock Breaker," sent the 33-year- old Mandaue City native to his knee with terrific body punches. Thai referee Samphan Saingkarak stopped the bout with 56 seconds left in the second round. The win earned for Rachman a title shot at IBF minimumweight champ Daniel Reyes of Colombia between February and July 2004. Tuñacao became the first IBO champ in the 105-lb division after stopping another Indon, Abrinset Matta, in the 10th round in Bali last March. But IBO stripped the belt from Tuñacao for being inactive and failing to defend his title on time. Tuñacao's record dropped to 38-2-6 with 18 knockouts, while Rachman improved to 55-7-3, with 19 KOs. *Rey Danseco, contributor*

Woods picks up another award

THOUSAND OAKS, California—Tiger Woods picked up another player of the year award Tuesday, and this vote wasn't even close. Woods was honored by the Golf Writers Association of America for a record fifth straight year. He also won player of the year from the PGA of America (based on a points system) and the PGA Tour (a vote by players, said to be among the closest ever). The GWAA selected Woods on 54 percent of the ballots. Vijay Singh, who has a testy relationship with the media, wasn't even second. Ernie Els got 18 percent of the vote, while Singh came in third with 14 percent. Woods led the PGA Tour with five victories, two of them World Golf Championships, and he won the Vardon Trophy with the second-lowest scoring average in history. *AP*

Armstrong is tops for kids

NEW YORK—Lance Armstrong is the kids' choice. The American cyclist was chosen by readers of Sports Illustrated For Kids magazine as the athlete of the year, edging baseball star Albert Pujols of the St. Louis Cardinals. Armstrong, who won his fifth straight Tour de France title last summer, received 8,599 votes of more than 43,000 cast. "It means a lot to me that it was voted on by kids," he said. Pujols was second with 8,514 votes, followed by LeBron James, Jason Kidd, Michael Vick and Roger Clemens. Last year's winner was Shaquille ONeal. *AP*

Cage clinic goes on school tour

BURLINGTON Basketball Skills Camp with Norman Black has embarked on a school tour to bring advanced cage training methods closer to the youth. "Going to the campuses will give our aspiring basketeers the opportunity to learn the latest techniques such as plyometrics direct from the professionals," said Rudy Tan, the general manager of Burlington Industries Phils. Inc. Last month, coach Black and his staff led by Eric Reyes and Beujing Acot were at St. Claire College in Caloocan where 81 students graduated from the three-day clinic. This month, the Burlington socks-sponsored project will be at Centro Escolar University in Mendiola, Manila. Other schools to be visited next year are Divine Light Academy in Las Piñas, Paco Catholic School and the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. For inquiries, call TEAM at 894-3576.

YKL cagers win Inter-Batch tilt

YKL Film whipped Anson's, 72-65, and captured the 2003 GCHS Inter-Batch Alumni basketball tournament at the GCHS gym. Christian Lim led the winner with 22 points and was instrumental in YKL's pressing defense that held Anson's to 10 points in the second period. Dexter Quan had 13 of his 23 points in the first quarter as Anson's raced to a 17-8 lead. But YKL exploded for 25 points in the second quarter to take a 33-27 advantage at halftime. Alvin Anne Lim and Gilbert Sanidad chipped in 18 and 15 for YKL, doing most of the damage in their murderous second quarter run. YKL, coached by Willy Chan, forced Anson's to a spate of turnovers in the pay-off period to douse its repeated rallies. UCM Cooling Coils, meanwhile, rallied from 34-42 halftime deficit to bag third place over last year's champion Konka, 74-70. Albert Chua paced the Cooling Coils with 23 points.

Roligon 4-cock derby on today

TOP cockers and breeders will clash today at Roligon Mega Cockpit when the much-fancied "Harvest Time and Flower 4-Cock Derby" gets going at 6 p.m. A total of 74 fights are on tap. According to pit manager Renato Shio, seeing action today are Boy Royo, LCC Leonard, Joel Ngo, Max and Bebot Roxas of Tarlac, Dicky Lim of Batangas, newspaper publisher Jake Macasaet, Eric dela Rosa of Pasay and Sta. Ana, William Co, Bobot Yu, Carding Ng, Boy Emerson Tan, Tony Davao, Gerry Ramos of Las Piñas, comebacking Alan Tan, Bobby Wong and Joey delos Santos, among others. Meanwhile, the "Noche Buena 5-Cock New Year Derby" is slated on Dec. 27 and 29, promoter Rolly Ligon's follow-up to the 273-entry "Apordabol Derby." For a low entry fee of P5,500, at stake is a guaranteed pot of P750,000.

RACING TIPS
AT SANTA ANA BY MR. 999

Race 1--1. Miss Bobon 2. Best in Class 3. Magiliw

Race 2--1. Andee's Ace 2. Hurricane Doding 3. Gimme A Ring 4. Top Quest

Race 3--1. Native Prince 2. Kagilagilalas 3. Silakbo 4. Skip Away 5. Sand Splash

Race 4--1. Noor 2. Jay Nicole 3. College Gem

Race 5--1. The Warrior 2. Queen Matawe 3. Stunning 4. Sweet Talk 5. Schwarzenegger

Race 6--1. Bold Lucky 2. Hole In One 3. Lucky Beat 4. Material Trick

Race 7--1. Touch of Luck 2. Habagat 3. Top Dancer 4. Bullish View 5. Voice of Destiny

Race 8--1. My Sheikh 2. Vice Free 3. Centra 4. Extreme Illusion 5. Mercurian

Race 9--1. Lord of the Ring 2. Impromptu 3. Lady Victoria 4. Top Bullet 5. Super Dancer 6. Fine Offer

JUNGOLF BACKER
Samsung Electronics Phils. Corp. president and CEO Sang Youl Eom (right) and tournament chair Gerard Cantada shake hands after signing the contract making Samsung the title sponsor of the 7th Samsung Philippine International Junior Golf Championships set next month from Jan. 5-9 at Wack Wack Golf & Country Club.

CHAMPION SQUAD
Members of the champion Blue Team of the first Mayor Emiliano Caruncho Jr. Memorial Badminton Cup are shown with tournament organizing committee members Rene Perez, Boogle Ona, Allan Lavarro, Nino Caruncho of Caruncho Scholarship Foundation, Wilfred Fragante of www.pbnet.net and Randy Villanueva of Tru-flex and Mondo badminton surfaces.

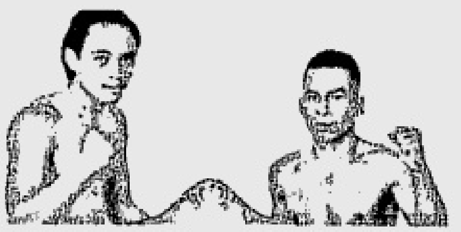
PABA TITLE FIGHT

Lunas, Surapol weigh-in

Salven L. Lagumbay
Contributor

DEFENDING Pan-Asia Boxing Association flyweight king Rolly Lunas will meet his challenger Phises Vor Surapol today when they take part in the official weigh-in at the Games and Amusements Board office in Makati City.

Lunas (15-2, 8 KOs) and Surapol will headline the San Miguel Corporation-sponsored "Battle in Bataan," a 12-round war set tomorrow at the People's Gym in Balanga, Bataan.



LUNAS (left) and Surapol

After the scheduled weigh-in, GAB Commissioner Emmanuel Palabrica and boxing division chief Emmanuel Flores will preside over the official Paba rules meeting.

The "Battle in Bataan" is supported by Bataan Governor Ding Roman, proceeds of which will go to the construction of a public library in Balanga. Roman also indicated that his free-to-the-public event is his Christmas gift to his constituents in Bataan.

Promoter Jun Sarreal, meanwhile, indicated that Lunas is in a make-or-break situation as a win will assure him of an improvement of his current WBA No. 14 rankings. Sarreal indicated that if victorious, he will work hard to give Lunas a chance to challenge newly crowned WBA flyweight champ Lorenzo Parra of Aragua, Venezuela.

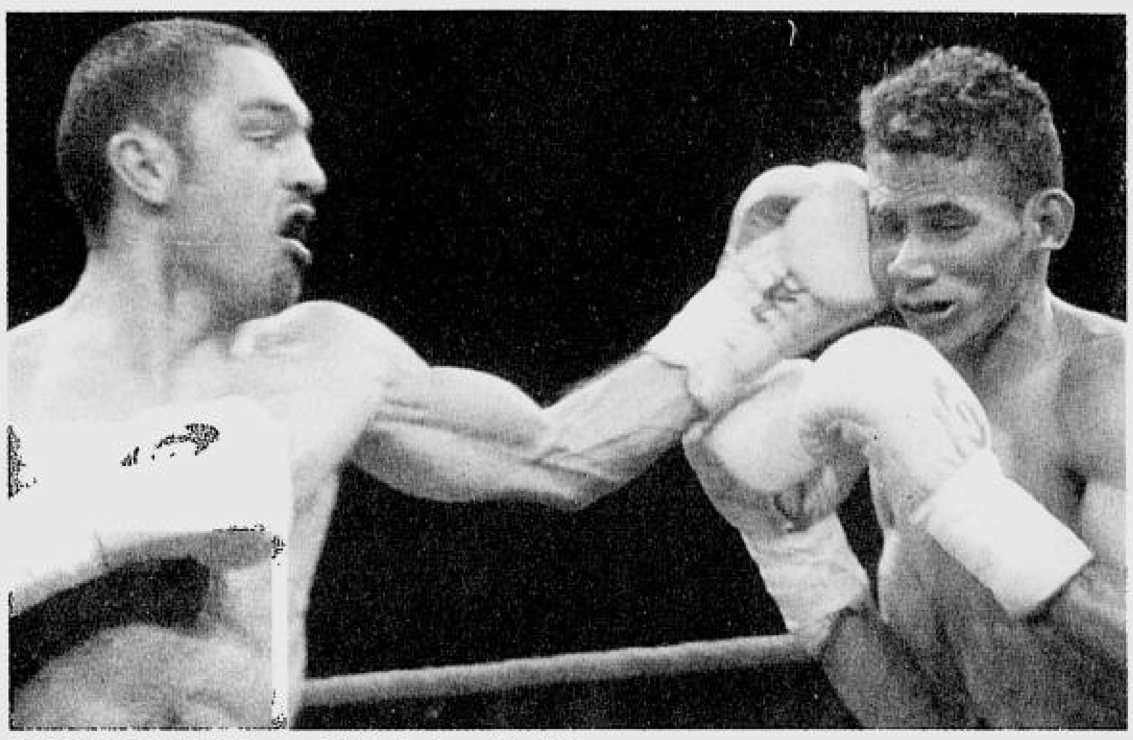
In the undercard, Philippine lightweight champ Fernando Montilla defends against top-ranked Larry Pelonia in another 12-rounder.

Monshipour keeps crown

PARIS—France's Mahyar Monshipour retained his WBA super bantamweight world title Tuesday against Venezuelan Jairo Tagliaffero, who threw in the towel at the start of the eighth round.

The defense, Monshipour's first since he took the title in July by knocking out countryman Salim Medjkoune, took the champion's record to 24 wins in 28 fights, with two draws and two defeats.

Monshipour, 28, is expected to next fight Medjkoune in a rematch. He wore down 26-year-old Tagliaffero, catching him with a crunching right-hand at the end of the sixth round in Levallois, outside Paris. *AP*



MONSHIPOUR (left) lands a left to the face of Tagliaffero. AP

Duplex, ₱1M at stake in Baguio Rotary tilt

WITH a multimillion prize package that includes a duplex home, P1 million cash, a brand-new car and a Rolex watch, the 18th edition of the Rotary Golfing Fellowship Foundation of the Philippines northern leg tournament will kick off on Jan. 15-17 at the Baguio Country Club and Camp John Hay courses in Baguio.

The St. Monique Duplex House is being put up by Globe Asiatic Realty as a hole-in-one prize in six holes, the P1 million cash pot on offer in four holes and the Toyota Altis also in four holes, giving participants several chances to hit the jackpot.

To make things more exciting, organizers are staking the Rolex watch together with a Taylor Made golf set and a big TV in three holes with three pins. If not won, the entire package will be raffled off.

"From previous experiences, we've had big hole-in-one winners in our Baguio venues. We've decided to raise the stakes and even give our participants more chances by putting three holes in one green," said RGFFP tournament director Albert Que.

Tournament winners in the event sponsored by Cebu Pacific, Copacabana Hotel, Pilipinas Shell, Futura Window Covering, Taylor Made and Fedex are also bound to receive handsome prizes.

Registration is now open with an early bird tournament fee of P4,500.

Interested parties may call the RGFFP office at 7218896 or 7210564 and inquire through Roselyn Lapore, Michele Arque and Annie Mejorada.

Registrants after the Jan. 7 deadline will be charged P1,000 more.

Off-course activities include the Directors Fellowship Night on Jan. 13, the President's Fellowship Night hosted by RGFFP president Pocholo Borromeo.

The Chairman's night of Melito "Bimbo" Salazar will coincide with the launching of the new RGFFP logo on Jan. 15. Que said that players will be allowed to play their practice rounds on Jan. 13 and 14.

Eastridge leg of Samsung Amateur blasts off today

FORMER national ladies champion and world jungolf champ Carmelette Villaroman banners the field in the seventh elimination leg of the Samsung Amateur Tour kicking off today at the up-and-down Eastridge Golf Club course in Binangonan, Rizal.

Villaroman will be challenged by top jungolfer Matet Salivio, who has been seasoned by stints in several international meets, and Josie Untal for the ladies division crown in the 36-hole multi-handicap level competitions offering slots to the tournament of division champions this March.

With the quick two-round play requiring every bit of consistency especially in a hazard-laden course like Eastridge, tournament organizer Boy Blue Ocampo said that club entries will have the edge in the various divisions of the men's side.

Ex-national team members Jay Bayron and Boyet Saragoza who head the men's cast, according to Ocampo, should expect stiff challenge in the championship class from reigning club champion Chino Raymundo, club golf director Erwin Temena and jungolf standout Mikee Camitoc.

They will all be trying to join early qualifiers from the previous legs like Jerome Delariarte, Juvic Pagunsan, Marc Lopez, Tristan Tabanas and JR Tanpinco in the grand finals set at Mt. Malarayat March 11-12, 2004.

Backing the tourney as cosponsors are Tokyo Tokyo, Microtel, Gatorade, Rogin-E, Dunlop Golf, Mario's Restaurant, Custom Clubmakers and Wilson with radio stations Killer-Bee, Citylite 88.3, Wave 89.1, Magic 89.9, 99.5 RT and 103.5 K-Lite as media partners.

Trophies and Samsung appliances will be awarded to the top three finishers in the championship, Class A, Class B and Class C for men and the Class A and Class B divisions for women.

Winners of the accompanying Samsung Putting Challenge will receive Samsung microwave ovens to go with the chance to compete in the grand finals.

The last qualifying leg will be held at Tagaytay Midlands on Jan. 22-23 before the Tour gives way to the Samsung National Interscholastics featuring the best jungolfers in the country scheduled in February.

E. Ridge bash Saturday

MEMBERS of Eagle Ridge have a lot of reasons to troop to their home club this coming Saturday, Dec. 20.

It will be a three-in-one event for Eagle Ridge members as they see action in the season-ending monthly tournament which promises to be the biggest with two of its four championship courses set to be used by the 200 players in the roster.

Those in Classes A (handicaps 0-12.9) and B (12-17.9) will be playing at the hazard-laden Faldo course while players in the C (18-27.9), D (28 and up) and ladies categories will be mixing it up at the brand-new layout designed by Greg Norman.

Everybody will be teeing off shotgun style at 8 a.m.

The 18-hole tourney also serves as the Christmas event with the club putting up a bonanza of prizes for the top finishers in each class apart from the usual raffle.

The club will also celebrate its recent come-from-behind victory in the Sta. Lucia Cup—the national series for clubs operating under the banner of the real estate giant. Eagle Ridge won the Sta. Lucia Cup for the third time in the last four years.

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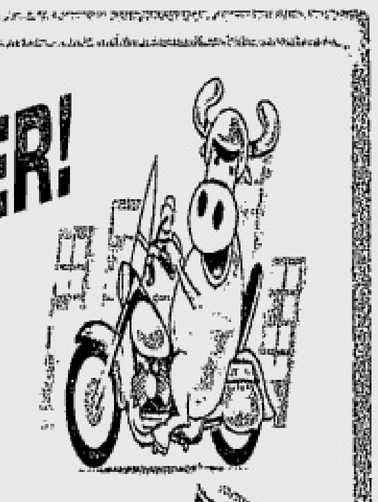

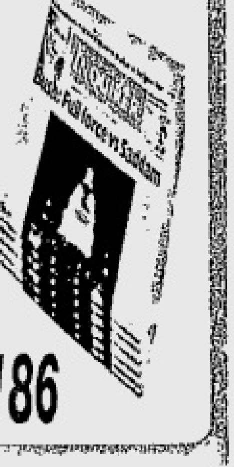

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A cheery Christmas celebration at The Bellevue Hotel

THE BELLEVUE Hotel, the first full-service business hotel in the Alabang area, fills its halls with cheers of the holiday season through various deals and promos to celebrate Christmas. Food lovers are sure to feel the merry spirit of the blessed season with specially-prepared Christmas buffets. The 12 Days of Christmas Special Dinner Buffet includes different salads with dressings, cold selections, soups, carvings, hot selections and desserts.

Enjoy a Madras salad with vinaigrette dressing, a variety of cheeses and cold cuts with French onion soup, roast turkey, prawn thermidor, baked fish fillet with hollandaise sauce, and ending it with a slice of mango cheesecake. The Bellevue Hotel's main dining outlet, the Café D' Asie, also prepared Christmas Lunch Buffets, a fancy Christmas plate filled with sweet treats and a select New Year's Eve Dinner Buffet perfect for welcoming 2004. Cap it off by indulging in Bellevue's Drink of the Month-White Christmas, which includes an adorable stuffed toy.

For those who wish to salute the coming year the Bellevue way, a special New Year rate is on offer from December 15 to January 4. For a reasonable P2,000++, guests can relax in the hotel's well-appointed rooms. For only P350+, guests can join The Bellevue Countdown Party on the 31st of December at the 20/20, the hotel's entertainment center. The entrance ticket includes 2 standard drinks, free appetizer for a group of 6, surprise raffle prizes, a special show at 10 p.m. and a rowdy countdown to greet the New Year.

The Bellevue Hotel, the family holiday destination south of Metro Manila, is nestled inside an information technology zone within the Filinvest Corporate City. It boasts of 222 deluxe and suite rooms, modern communications and banquet facilities, an entertainment lounge on its top floor, swimming pool, the latest in fitness services and spa treatments. For inquiries and reservations, please call 771-8181.

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Tasteful surprises at Waterfront Insular Hotel

WATEFRONT Insular Hotel Davao offers patrons scrumptious delights this yuletide season.

Enjoy the Café Uno Buffet Lunch featuring a variety of tasteful surprises this December for only P400.00 net per person. Indulge on the International Buffet on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays; Spanish Buffet on Mondays; Japanese Buffet during Wednesdays; Thai-Viet Buffet every Friday; and Filipino Buffet with Lechon on Saturdays.

Meanwhile, Pool Aquarius invites you to dive and partake of the Neptune Burger (Tuna), Waikiki Burger (Chicken), Cheesy Onion and Mushroom Burger (see photo) and the Chili Con Carne Burger for only P210.00 net per order. These luscious burgers are served daily from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Whet your appetite and try all these exciting offerings at Waterfront Insular Hotel Davao. For inquiries please call Manila Sales and Reservations Office at (02) 687-0888.

Makati Shangri-La wins Kalakbay's Deluxe Hotel of the Year

MAKATI Shangri-La has been selected as the 2001-2002 Kalakbay Award winner for the "Hotel of the Year" Deluxe category.

The Kalakbay Awards are the most coveted recognition in the travel industry spearheaded by the Department of Tourism and the Philippine Convention and Visitors Corporation (PCVC). The award aims to develop tourism consciousness by recognizing local and international companies as well as individuals who have contributed significantly to Philippine tourism.

Opened in 1993, Makati Shangri-La has become the most prominent deluxe hotel in the Philippines. It offers 699 newly renovated guestrooms and suites. These rooms are complemented by nine specialty restaurants (two of which have been fully refurbished recently) and bars, a fully equipped Health Club, Spa and a 24-hour Business Centre that ably caters to the needs of international business travelers.

The hotel has also emerged as the choice venue for international and national conventions, meetings, and social events.

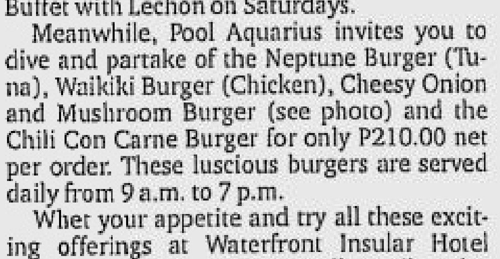

Photo shows Makati Shangri-La's general manager Jarlath Lynch (center), receiving the award from Tourism Secretary Dick Gordon (extreme right) and Malaysian Minister for Culture, Arts and Tourism Datu Abdul Kadir bin Haji Sheikh Fadzir.

Dusit Hotel Nikko's holiday countdown room package

JOIN Dusit Hotel Nikko in welcoming the year 2004 with their Holiday Countdown Room Package.

From Dec. 15 to Jan. 15, 2004, stay with your family (2 adults and 2 kids below 12 years old) for 3 days in a deluxe room at Dusit Hotel Nikko and get an amazing P1,000 discount on each day. From P3,600 net on your first day to P2,600 net on your second day and pay only P1,600 net on your third day. Enjoy the unbelievable discount plus perks.

For extra indulgence this Holiday Season, enjoy the discount on the hotel's Executive Club starting from P5,800 in your first night and P1,000 discount on your second and another P1,000 discount on your third night. The Landmark Suite offers P7,800 on your first night, P6,800 on the second night and P5,800 on the third night.

For queries and reservations, call at 867-3333.

Have a merry whimsical Christmas at Taal Vista Hotel

MAKE your family holiday special with Taal Vista Hotel's "One Whimsical Christmas." On Dec. 20, treat your kids to a special Christmas party packed with entertainment, fun, games, and a sumptuous buffet lunch with kids' favorite dishes. Priced at only P500 net for adults and P250 net for children below 12 years old. Kids under 3 years are free.

Sample a wide selection of festive food from around the world on Dec. 25 as Christmas carols welcome you at café-on-the-ridge. Priced at only P700 net per person for the brunch. As a bonus, enjoy 20 percent off the Holiday Hot Deal room price if you avail of the Christmas Day Feast.

Moreover, an exciting dinner dance with a grand fireworks display will be held on Dec. 31 for the grandest new year celebration ever. Priced at P700 net at the café-on-the-ridge.

For reservations and inquiries call their Manila Sales office at tel. nos. 889-5046 or 889-1000.

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7 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
8 MYSTIC RIVER

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1 DARK BLUE
2 RUGRATS GO WILD
3 SCARY MOVIE 3
4 GOOD BOY!
5 ELF
6 ZHO YU'S TRAIN
7 THE GRUDGE
8 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2

SM CITY BACOOR
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1 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
2 SCARY MOVIE 3
3 CABIN FEVER
4 LOST ISLAND
5 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
6 MR. SUAVE
7 HUWAG KANG KIKIBO
8 STAR RUNNER

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8 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
9 MATRIX REVOLUTIONS
10 MR. SUAVE

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3 ALIPIN
4 MYSTIC RIVER
5 MR. SUAVE
6 THE GRUDGE
7 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
8 CABIN FEVER
9 CHAVIT SINGSON
10 BIKTIMA
11 JEANNIE, BAKIT NGAYON KA LANG
12 INTERNET QUEEN

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3 ELF
4 SCARY MOVIE 3
5 GOOD BOY!
6 THE PHONE

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2 SCARY MOVIE 3
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4 STAR RUNNER

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7 MYSTIC RIVER
8 ELF
9 THE GRUDGE
10 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
11 LOST ISLAND
12 LIBERATED

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2 HUWAG KANG KIKIBO
3 MR. SUAVE
4 LOST ISLAND

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1 RUGRATS GO WILD
2 RESERVED
3 STAR RUNNER
4 COLD CREEK MANOR
5 OUT OF TIME
6 SCARY MOVIE 3
7 RESERVED
8 ELF

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2 ELF
3 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
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2 OUT OF TIME
3 SCARY MOVIE 3
4 FIGHTING TEMPTATIONS

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1 MASTER & COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD
11:00 FS/11:40 MF/2:30/5:20/8:10/10:30 LFS/11:00 LMF/1:20 END

2 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS
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1 MYSTIC RIVER 12:40, 3:20, 6:10, 9:00 THX	4 LOST ISLAND 10:20, 12:40, 3:00, 5:20, 7:40, 10:00
2 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING 11:30, 3:00, 6:00	5 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2 10:50, 1:00, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, 9:50
3 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS 11:00, 2:30, 6:00, 9:30	6 THE GRUDGE 12:50, 2:50, 4:50, 6:55, 9:00
7 INTERNET QUEEN 11:40, 1:40, 3:40, 5:40, 7:40, 9:40	9 CABIN FEVER 10:50, 1:00, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, 9:50
8 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY 12:05, 2:15, 4:25, 6:30, 9:00	10 ELF 12:05, 2:15, 4:25, 6:30, 9:00

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1 MYSTIC RIVER - 11:25, 2:10, 4:55, 7:35, 10:00
2 ELF - 10:10, 12:10, 2:10, 4:10, 6:10, 8:00, 9:50
3 CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
4 LOTR: FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING - 11:20, 2:50, 6:20, 9:50
5 LOST ISLAND - - 10:10, 12:25, 2:40, 4:55, 7:15, 9:40
6 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2 - 11:15, 1:25, 3:40, 5:55, 8:10, 10:00
7 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY - 11:30, 1:40, 3:50, 6:00, 8:10, 10:00

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Marcos hway

1 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
2 LOST ISLAND
3 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
4 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS
5 CABIN FEVER
6 LOONEY TUNES
7 MYSTIC RIVER
8 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2

Novaliches 935-3229 / 31

1 THE GRUDGE
2 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
3 LOST ISLAND
4 CABIN FEVER
5 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS
6 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
7 MYSTIC RIVER
8 GOOD BOY

Malabon 288-0985/2575		Cainta 240-4061
HUWAG KANG KIKIBO, SIYA ANG HIHIPO	1	THE MEDALLION
JENNIE BAKIT NGAYON KA LANG?	2	JENNIE BAKIT NGAYON KA LANG?
LOST ISLAND	3	HUWAG KANG KIKIBO, SIYA ANG HIHIPO
BIKTIMA	4	BIKTIMA

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ALIPIN	4	INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
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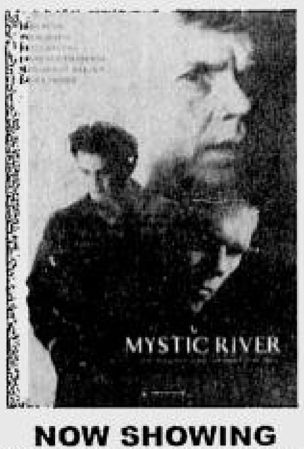

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Ben, J Lo still together, he says

"I THINK we made a mistake," Affleck says of himself and Lopez, shown in photo taken in last October.

WASHINGTON—Hollywood actor Ben Affleck insisted Tuesday that he was still with pop star-actress Jennifer Lopez, but said they had gone through ups and downs since they called off their wedding.

"Yes, we are together," Affleck told ABC television.

"Some days are better than others. Of course we are still together." The superstar couple called off their wedding in September amidst a media frenzy over the venue and other details. Later there was media speculation that the postponement had been followed by a split.

Affleck, 31, and 34-year-old Lopez met while making the film "Gigli" which proved a spectacular flop.

"Jennifer Lopez and I are going to take our life at our own pace," said Affleck.

"I think we made a mistake, Jen and I. Maybe because we were happy and having fun and enjoying our lives, we were too available. We may have not been guarded enough. I don't know. But I think I'm probably not going to talk about whether or not I'm getting married on television."

AFP

Araneta Center
ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

ALI MALL CINEPLEX 7

Ali 1	GENIE, BAKIT?
Ali 2	ALIPIN
Ali 3	CABIN FEVER
Ali 4	LOST ISLAND
Ali 5	JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
Ali 6	INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
Ali 7	MYSTIC RIVER

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MAXIM	CLOSED
MIRAMAR	SEX BOMB / RAMPADORA
ODEON	X-MEN 2
ODEON-2	BUKID AY BASA / KASIBULAN
ROBEN	BOLD STAR
TANDEM-1	SUGAT
TANDEM-2	KATAWAN MO LANGIT KO
TIMES	SPY LEGEND [illegible]

QUEZON CITY	
ACT-1	SENSUAL ISLAND
ACT-2	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
ACT-3	ORIGINAL SIN
ACT-4	HANGGANG KAILAN KA PAPATAY
CORONET A	ALIPIN
CORONET B	A MAN APART
QUEZON-1	BERTUD NG PUTIK
REMAR	X-MEN 2
REMAR-2	BOLD STAR

NOVA MALL - NOVALICHES CINEMA	
A	LIBERATED
B	AKO, IKAW, SIYA
C	

MANDALUYONG CITY	
SHANGRI-LA PLAZA MALL	635-20-79 / 633-78-51 TO 70
CINEMA-1	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CINEMA-2	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION

CAINTA RIZAL	
STA. LUCIA EAST	(681-5401 TO 19)
CINEMA-1	BIKTIMA
CINEMA-2	ALIPIN
CINEMA-3	WAG KANG KIKIBO
CINEMA-4 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	MR SUAVE
CINEMA-5 (DTS)	LORD OF THE RINGS 1
CINEMA-6	CHAVIT
CINEMA-7	BABAE SA BREAKWATER
CINEMA-8	ASBOOBS
CINEMA-9 (DTS)	LOST ISLAND
CINEMA-10 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	LORDS OF THE RINGS 2
CINEMA-11 (SDDS)	STAR RUNNER
CINEMA-12	CABIN FEVER
CINEMA-14	JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
CINEMA-15	ELF

LORES	
CINEMA-2	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-3	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT

NE CINEMAGIC - CABANATUAN	
(LAS PINAS)	OUT OF TIME
CINEMA-1	JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
CINEMA-2	FIGHTING TEMPTATIONS
CINEMA-4	COLD CREEK MANOR

UNIWIDE COASTAL MALL	
(PARANAQUE)	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-1	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
CINEMA-2	MEN IN BLACK II
CINEMA-4	SELDA

Williams brings laughter to Iraq

BAGHDAD, Iraq—"Goooood morning Baghdad!" With those words, a play on his 1987 movie "Good Morning Vietnam," US actor Robin Williams took the outdoor stage at Baghdad International Airport on Tuesday and delivered a barrage of raunchy comedy that was just intelligible enough to be hilarious.

He was the lead performer of a United States military entertainment show that also featured actress Shannon Tweed, wrestler Curt Angle and stock car driver Mike Wallace.

Perched on a flatbed trailer, Williams told the crowd of about 200 American and Australian soldiers their clothes would be fashionable on the inner city streets of Los Angeles.

"I'm looking at a group of heavily armed people here," he said.

"I'm telling myself, 'If you're not funny, it's a problem.'" *AP*

Human touch still needed in animation

AFTER digital animation hit it big a couple of years ago, hand-drawn cartoon productions have been regarded as a dead genre at the box office. We don't agree with this cavalier putdown, because there's something about digital, computer-generated cartoons that sometimes comes off as too slick and machine-made. The human touch is still needed in animation.

That's why we're happy to hear that Disney's new hand-drawn animated feature, "Brother Bear," has proven to be a success at the box office. Directed by Aaron Blaise and Bob Walker, "Bear" tells a tale about brotherhood that underscores the bond between brothers, as well as man's relationship with nature.

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

Instead of pitting "digital" versus "hand-drawn," animators agree that the key element in either method isn't technique, but great storytelling, accessible characters and inspiring themes.

Early on, the makers of "Brother Bear" decided to use the moose character as the film's comic icon. They also thought up a lot of other interesting characters to keep young viewers happy, and utilized great music and Disney themes to entertain parents and the general audience.

Music has turned out to be an important element in modern-day cartoon features. That's why one of the strong selling points of "Brother Bear" is the involvement of singer-songwriter-composer **Phil Collins**, who wrote six new songs for the movie, including "Great Spirits," performed by **Tina Turner**.

Looking at the film year as a whole, it's been a great time for animated features. They have been paced by "Finding Nemo," another Disney production, which has grossed $340 million to date—making it not just the best-selling animated feature of 2003, but the year's top-grossing movie, period.

That's why many new animated projects have been put in various stages of production by Disney, DreamWorks and other studios, for showing in 2004 and 2005.

The Oscars on Feb. 29, 2004 are also expected to come up with a strong roster of finalists in its Best Animated Feature category, further underscoring the great comeback that full-length cartoons, both digital and hand-drawn, have made in the past few years.

'The Movie Album'

BARBRA Streisand's 60th compilation, "The Movie Album," has been certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America, marking the celebrated musical artist's 49th RIAA gold certification.

Streisand has gotten more gold certifications than any recording artist in history, with the exception of **Elvis Presley**. She also holds the highest number of gold and platinum (29) certifications of any female artist.

In addition, she's the highest-selling female recording artist ever, and the only artist to have had a No. 1 album in each of the past four decades! A national poll by Reuters named Streisand and **Frank Sinatra** as the favorite female and male singers of the last century.

"The Movie Album" features 12 new recordings produced by Streisand, including "Smile" from the film "Modern Times," "I'm in the Mood for Love" from "Every Night at Eight," "More in Love with You" from "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," and "Goodbye for Now" from "Reds."

Streisand co-produced three-tracks—"Moon River" from "Breakfast at Tiffany's," "How Do You Keep the Music Playing" from "Best Friends," and "Calling You" from "Baghdad Café"—with **Robbie Buchanan**, and one track—"Emily" from "The Americanization of Emily"—with **Johnny Mandel**.

All the songs in "The Movie Album" were recorded with full-band accompaniment by a 75-piece orchestra. The album includes a DVD with song-by-song annotation by Streisand, plus bonus videos of "Wild Is the Wind" and "I'm in the Mood for Love."

Streisand dedicates "The Movie Album"... to my friend **Gregory Peck**, a screen legend who in real life possessed all the humanity and dignity he brought to his career-defining roles."

Feedback

FROM Ellen Ongkeko-Marfil: "Thank you so much for boosting our 'I-Witness' documentary festival at UP, and thank you too for all of the comments, criticism and suggestions you gave us throughout the program's five years of existence.

"The festival was quite a success. As **Luli Lacaba** of UP Film Institute said, this was their most successful documentary festival, as thousands trooped to the University Cinema, filling it throughout the festival's three days.

"More than that, the festival was an eye-opener. Teachers asked us if we could hold the festival in regions outside Metro Manila. We plan to hold more festivals in the future.

"Our documentaries are not perfect, due to limited time, resources and experience. But, with greater exposure and appreciation, we hope to produce better documentaries."

DID YOU KNOW...

Megastar **Sharon Cuneta** and actor **Richard Gomez** are said to be interested in buying land in Lipa City, Batangas. They reportedly asked the Lipa City mayor, actress **Vilma Santos**, to help them look for reasonably priced lots. The Star for All Seasons last week told INQUIRER Entertainment her intention to run for reelection in the 2004 elections.

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INTOLERABLE CRUELTY PG13 12:50, 3:10, 5:30, 7:50, 10:10	RUGRATS GO WILD GP 1:20, 3:10, 5:00, 7:00, 9:00	LORD OF THE RINGS 2 "TWO TOWERS" GP 12:05, 3:20, 6:35, 9:50

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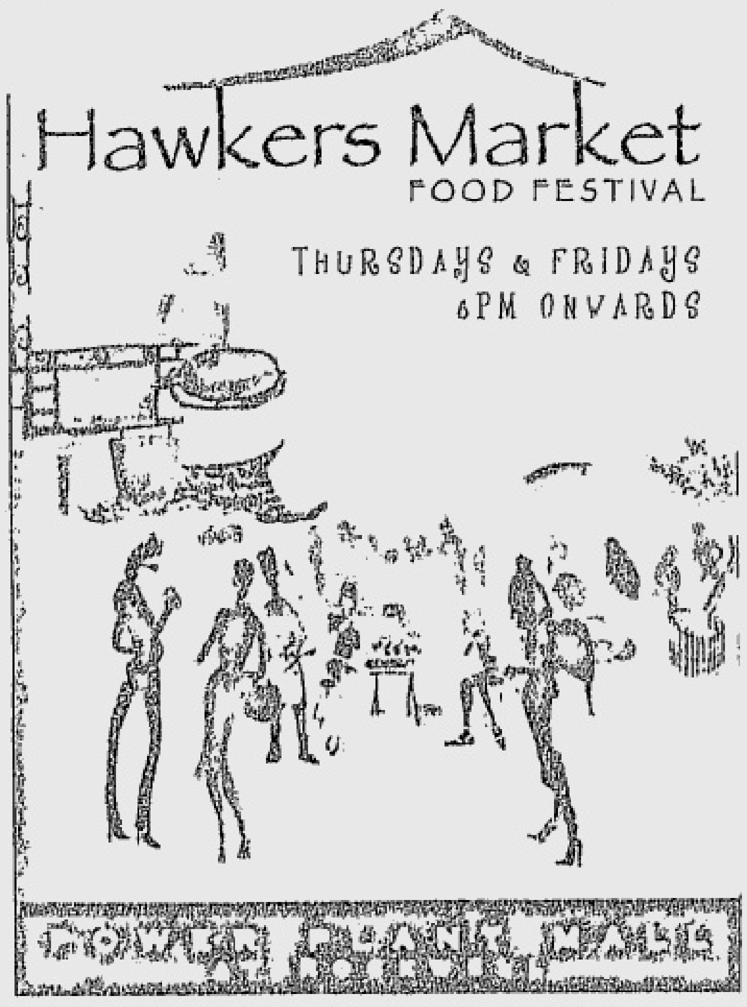

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2 LOST ISLAND	2 THE GRUDGE	2 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2 12:50, 3:00, 5:10, 7:20, 9:30	THX GUARANTEED SEATS LORD OF THE RINGS: TWO TOWERS 1:00	2 MYSTIC RIVER
3 CABIN FEVER	THX GUARANTEED SEATS 3 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY 2:05, 4:50, 7:50, 10:10	REGINE VELASQUEZ Dec. 19 & 20 - 9pm	GUARANTEED SEATS 3 ELF 2:50, 5:00, 7:10, 9:20, 11:30	3 ELF
4 OUT OF TIME	4 PIRATES OF THE CARRIBEAN		GUARANTEED SEATS 4 MYSTIC RIVER 3:00, 5:50, 8:40, 11:30	4 UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN
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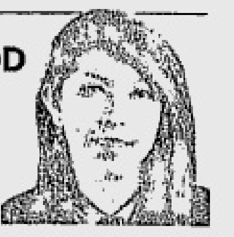
Maureen Larrazabal takes over Angelu's slot



DOLLYWOOD

Dolly Ann Carvajal

TJ Manotoc and I are delighted that **Maureen Larrazabal** will start being our co-host every Thursday, starting tonight, on our show on IBC–13, "Celebrity Dat Com" (9:30-10:30 p.m.).

For the past months since **Angelu de Leon** was booted out of the show due to unresolved differences with IBC's higher-ups, we had been trying out different co-hosts. Although all guest co-hosts had a flair of their own, we immediately established rapport with Maureen.

She is equally nervous and excited about doing the hosting chores. "I'm used to doing comedy and making *pa-sexy*," she said, "but this time I always have to be on my toes. It's a welcome challenge."

She's candid and chatty and, most important, she has no attitude problem. With all the *chika* she knows, I sometimes kid her that she must have been a reporter in her previous life. When I teased her to lend me her cleavage even just for a day, she laughed, "No need! This is not really mine. It's a product of medical science!"

Such openness will surely endear her to viewers immediately.

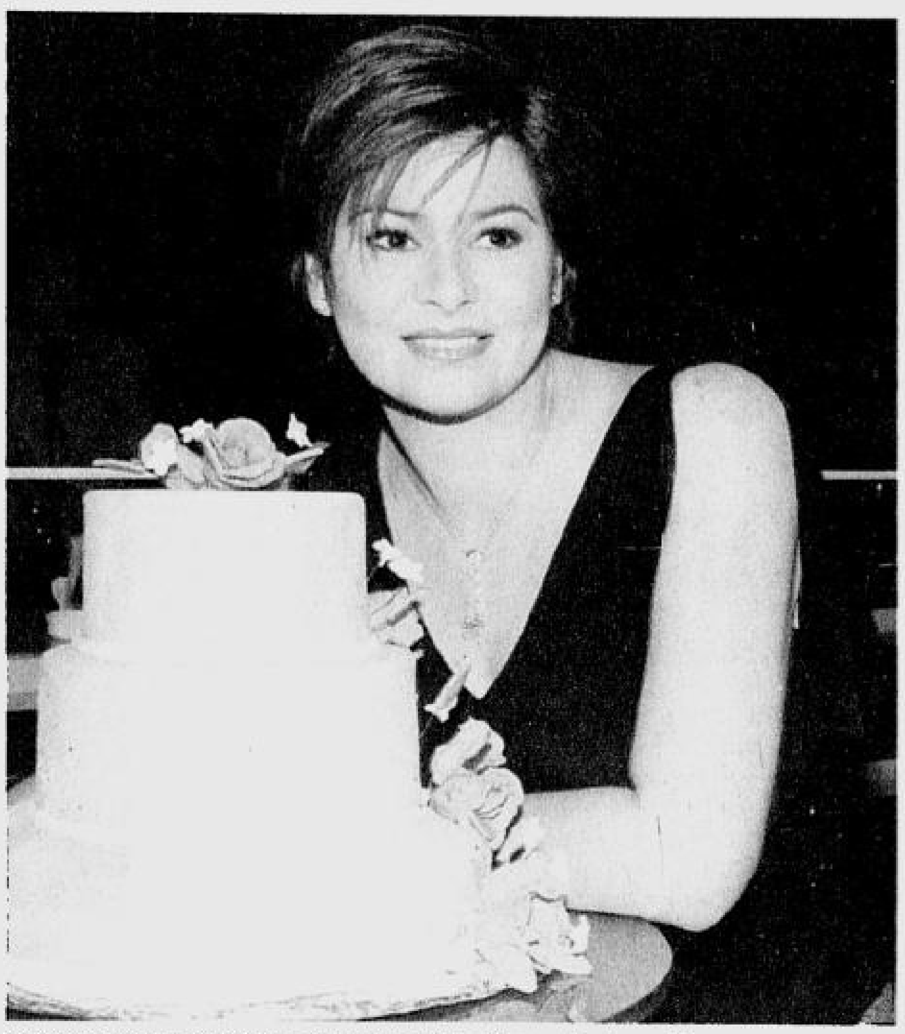
Aiko's birthday wish

AIKO Melendez couldn't wish for anything more for her birthday.

"For myself, I have no particular wish," she said at her birthday party Monday night. "I'm pretty happy with the way my life is right now.

"If there's anything I wish for, it's for my son Andre to be healthy always and for the coming elections to be peaceful. Hope there will be no bloodshed."

Aiko has transcended the typical vanities of a celebrity and her heart is set on more significant things that she can do for others as a full-fledged politician.



BIRTHDAY GIRL Aiko Melendez makes wishes for son Andre and for peace VAL HANDUMON

Imelda at Sundance

THE SUNDANCE Film Festival, a top gathering of independent filmmakers in the US, will include a film about former First lady **Imelda Marcos**—"Imelda," produced and directed by **Ramona Diaz.**

Sundance, which is backed by actor **Robert Redford**, puts 16 features and 16 documentaries in competition in its January festival in Park City, Utah. Each year, movie fans travel to the mountain town east of Salt Lake City to see what young filmmakers have on their mind.

Sundance is known for quirky and offbeat fare as well as for the stars who turn out on the streets of Park City to promote their work.

Based on an early commentary on the film, Imelda Marcos likes to talk. With a pained expression on his face, a Jesuit priest explains how Imelda once lectured him for hours and then put on a videotape about herself when she got tired. This trait is invaluable in the hands of documentary filmmaker Ramona S. Diaz. As wife of the former Philippine dictator, Mrs. Marcos hardly seems to weigh her words, unwittingly divulging far more than she would probably want to. She does not seem to realize that the untruths she sometimes peddles can easily be refuted by witnesses or archive footage –which happens here in this docu. Imelda is the center of her own universe and feels utterly invulnerable there.

The filmmaker introduces opponents, relatives, friends, Imelda's couturier and American diplomats. Imelda is clearly not the only one who believes in the Imelda myth. Even an American member of the jury that acquitted her of fraud proudly shows an autographed picture of hers. It is distressing to watch how this undoubtedly gifted woman lives in a make-believe world. She still has the audacity to speak about beauty and art, while her countrymen live in poverty. She just closes her eyes to trash and hideousness.

Looking for Mr. Right

A COMEDY of manners about three women struggling to find the perfect mate in a world of imperfect men. That is the story of "Bridal Shower," the entry of Seiko Films in the Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF).

Directed by **Jeffrey Jeturian**, whose last directorial project was 2001's "Tuhog," "Bridal Shower" stars **Dina Bonnevie, Cherrie Pie Picache** and **Francine Prieto** as advertising executives in search for Mr. Right.

Tates (Dina Bonnevie) feels her biological clock ticking. She's in love, but the man of her dreams is married, although his marriage is on the rocks. Because she knows time is running out, she offers to shoulder the cost of his annulment, in exchange for a promise that they will get married. She's so desperate to get married that she hires a lawyer, bribes judges and spends her time and money on getting the annulment for him, thinking that it is the way to get what she wants.

Katie (Cherrie Pie Picache) is overweight, plain-looking and suffering from a bad case of low self-esteem. Unable to land a man, she resorts to trying to find one on the Internet.

When their friend Sonia (Francine Prieto) announces she is pregnant and contemplating marriage, Katie and Tates decide to throw her a bridal shower. Katie and her friends visit a gay bar to hire a macho dancer for the shower. Unknown to Katie, it is there that she will find the love she's been looking for.

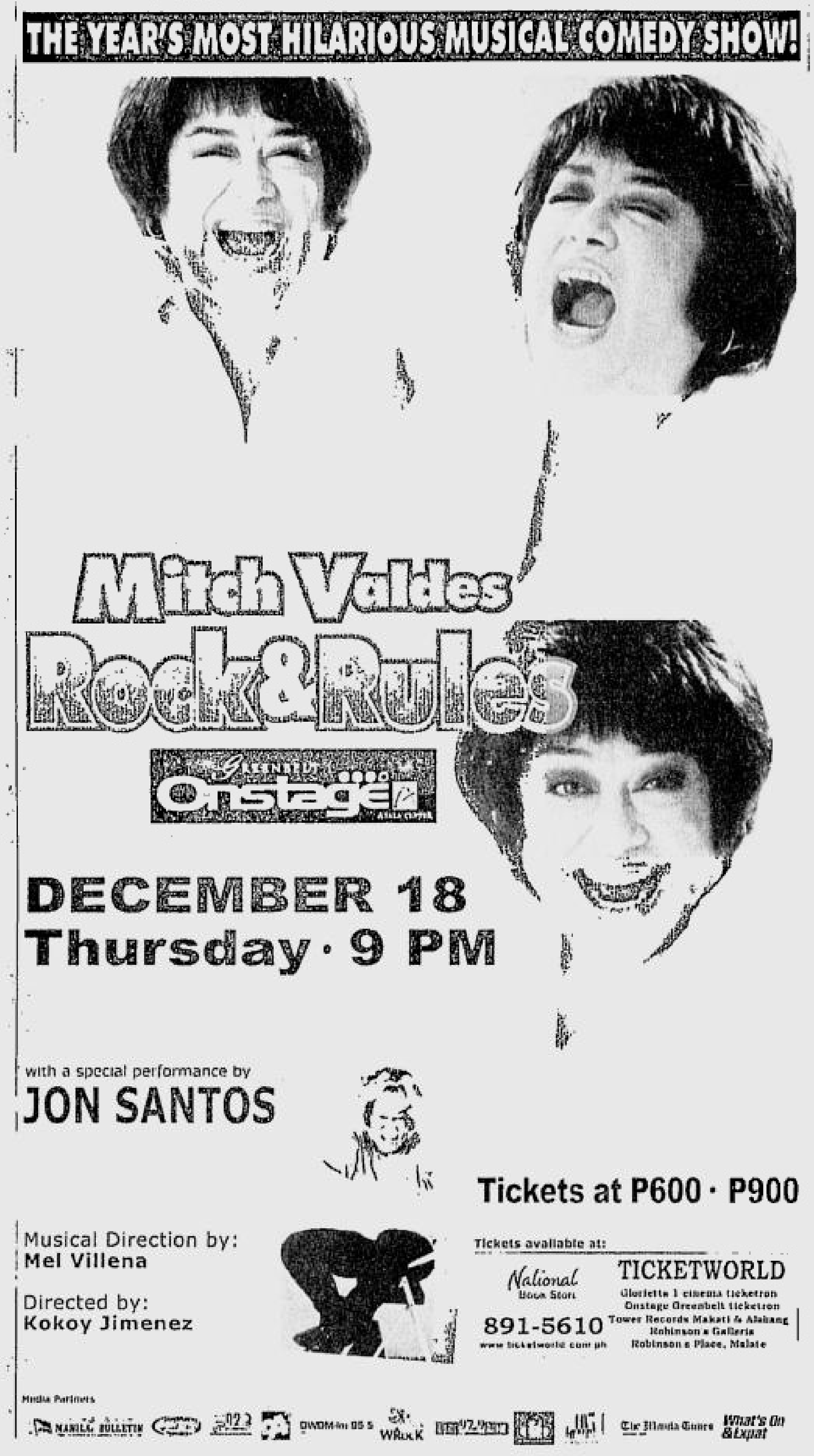
Sonia, the liberated one, finds herself pregnant, but because she has two boyfriends, she is not sure which one is the father. Does she choose the poor artist whom she loves, or the rich man who can provide security but not love?

Also starring are **Christian Vasquez, Rodel Velayo** (in another gay role), **Alfred Vargas** (in his first lead role), and newcomers **Juancho Valentino**, winner of the Bodyshots 2000 competition, and Douglas Robinson, a runner-up in the 2002 Mossimo Bikini Summit.

Chris Martinez wrote the script, supervised by award-winning **Armando "Bing" Lao.**

"It's basically a comedy of manners with light dramatic touches," says Jeturian, who also directed "Pila Balde." "But beyond the humor, the narrative voice of the movie is equally important. Aside from being entertaining, it also has to be meaningful. I think we've achieved that in this movie. I expect it to pull some surprises during the awards night."

For feedback, e-mail friends_elpueblo@yahoo.com or dollyanne@truefaithband.com



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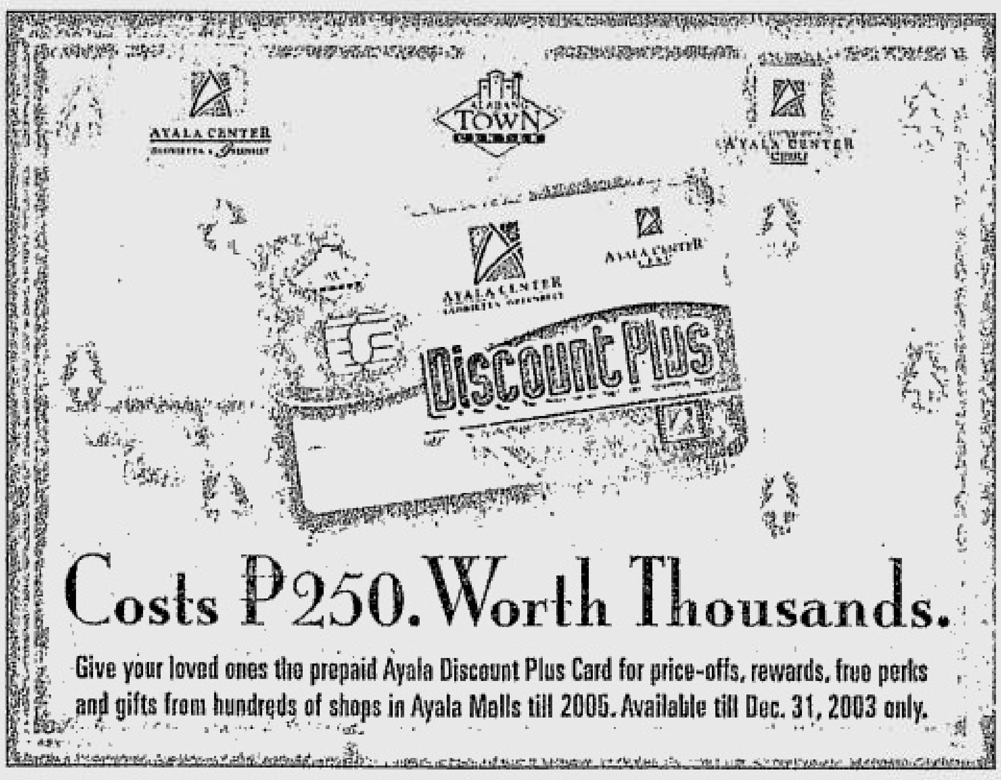

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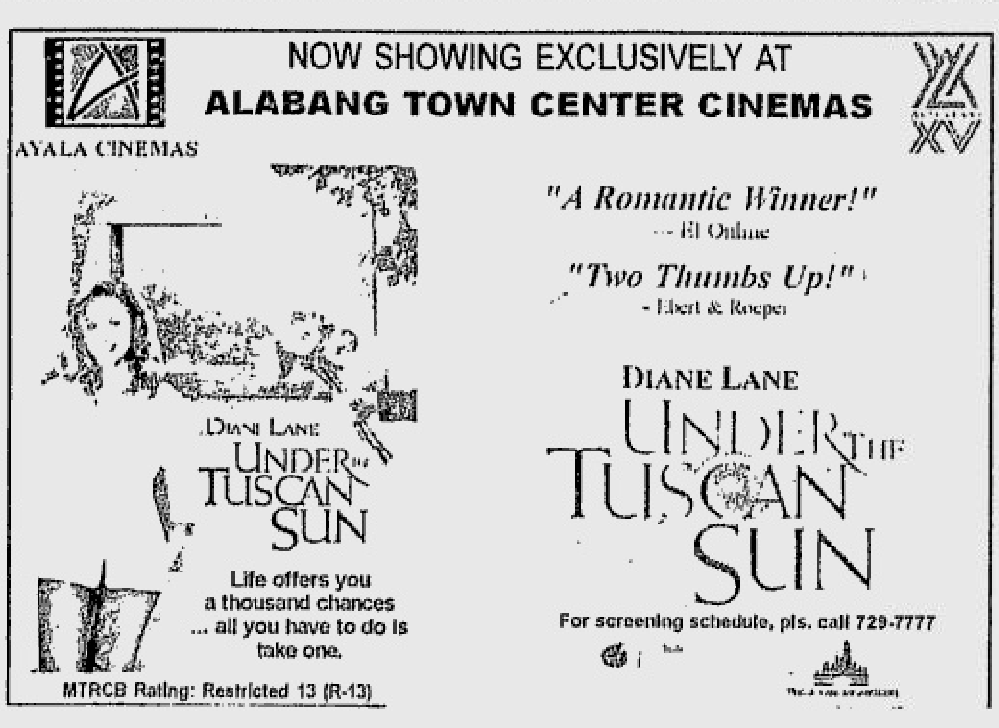
DID YOU KNOW...

Comedy king **Dolphy** was shopping at the DKNY section of Rustan's Makati last Saturday afternoon with some of his kids, including actor **Jeffrey Quizon.** Dolphy was in denims and blue printed long sleeves with matching bull cap. The comedian is known for his penchant for wearing designer clothes.



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Editor Louie C. Camino

Sharon: I won't campaign for anyone

'Lord, please make me 'payat'

THE MEGASTAR, (left)who stars with Angel Aquino and Hilda Koronel in "Crying Ladies," (below) also wants a third baby.

By Marinel R. Cruz

MEGASTAR Sharon Cuneta said she would not campaign for any presidential candidate in the 2004 election.

"*Hindi na lang ako sasali riyan,*" she said. "Kiko (her husband, Sen. Francis Pangilinan) lets me be."

The star of Unitel Pictures' "Crying Ladies" also confessed that she is hoping to have a third baby in the new year.

"And also, Lord," Sharon said while laughing, last Monday night, "please make me *payat* (thin)."

Sharon, speaking during the premiere of "Crying Ladies" Monday night, said she is now taking medications to strengthen her immune system in preparation for her pregnancy.

She also wishes for "health for my family and safety for everybody."

Her senator husband is chair of the Liberal Party's national organizing committee and is a member of the so-called "Wednesday Group," which also includes senators Manny Villar, Ralph Recto and Noli de Castro.

Villar is allegedly pushing for De Castro to run for president in 2004.

Sharon describes action king and presidential aspirant Fernando Poe Jr. as "one of my best friends" and former education secretary Raul Roco, who is also a presidential candidate, as "a friend."

"I have respect for President Macapagal-Arroyo, but . . . ," she said and shook her head as her words trailed off.

"Even if we elect five presidents at the same time, *may reklamo pa rin ang tao,*" she said. "One group cannot make this country work by themselves, *lahat kasi gustong mag*-participate."

Frankie, her daughter with the senator, turned 3 last Dec. 16. KC Concepcion, 18, Sharon's daughter with former actor Gabby Concepcion (who is now based in the United States), will arrive tomorrow from France, where she is studying.

"I wish I could have at least four children, but it's too difficult for me to give birth," the megastar said. "One more child would be okay."

She said her doctors advised her not to do anything strenuous. So, the 37-year-old actress said she would avoid doing movies and concerts and would simply concentrate on "Sharon," her Sunday variety show on ABC-CBN.

"I can't even appear in concerts as a guest performer," she explained. "Every month, I go to the doctor for shots. So far, I've had 12."

Sharon and her family will celebrate the New Year in Thailand. The Pangilinans will leave on Dec. 26 and will return on Jan. 2.

"With Frankie, I'm enjoying motherhood all over again, but on a different level," she said. "I always tell KC, you enjoyed my youth. I remember attending her school's sports fests even when I had just come from a shooting and had hardly slept."

She said that around Frankie, she is more laid back and quiet. "Frankie is my new best friend. Sometimes, it breaks my heart to have to leave her in the house when I go to work."

The actress said she and Stella, her character in "Crying Ladies," are very much alike.

"Both of us have simple dreams, simple aspirations," she said. "Despite our weaknesses, we're still trying to be good mothers."

"Crying Ladies" is her first movie in the MMFF.

Tony Gloria, the producer of the critically acclaimed "American Adobo," also produced "Crying Ladies." The new movie is based on the Palanca award-winning screenplay by veteran commercial director Mark Meily, who made his first film feature in "Crying Ladies."

Sharon said she gave Gloria "very friendly terms" on her talent fee, "because I believe in the project. It's a movie that I would love to watch again with my kids after 30 years, and with my grandchildren after 30 more years."

She said that if the movie performs well at the box office, it could signal the return of "small-end but meaningful" movies in the coming year.

"But you know what," she added, "if you do a movie you like, it won't really matter if it does well at the tills or not."

She said there are plans for "Crying Ladies" to be shown in selected theaters in the United States as well as in several international film festivals.

"But everything will depend on the reaction of Filipino viewers," she said. "It is not a mainstream movie. I hope the local audience will appreciate it."

"Crying Ladies" is about three professional mourners in Chinatown, paid to cry at Chinese funerals and burials. It also features Hilda Koronel, Angel Aquino, Ricky Davao, Sharmaine Centenera, Raymond Bagatsing and child actor Julio Pacheco.

Today, Sharon joins other stars in the Parade of Stars in San Fernando, Pampanga as part of the film festival. She will also join the Metro Manila motorcade on Dec. 24, the eve of the opening of the festival.

A motorcade in Cagayan de Oro is scheduled on Dec. 20 and another in Cebu City on Dec. 22.

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Christmas Medley

Globally Acclaimed
The Loboc Children's Choir
December 20, Sat. 3:30 pm (Preview) 7:00 pm (Gala Night)
December 21, Sun. 3:00 pm & 7:00 pm
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Fresh from a successful 11-country European tour, the overall winner of the 6th International Folksong Choir Festival in Spain and 3-time winner of the National Music Competition for Young Artists, the Loboc Children's Choir will bring to life Christmas and folk classics you've known and loved.

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Experience the joys of the Season with a Cinematic Feast of the Best Christmas films for the whole family!
Admission is Free!

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December 24, 2pm
December 26 - 28 & 30, 2pm
Carousel Court, Level 2
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Call Customer Service at 850-3514 or visit www.festivalsupermall.com
Holiday Shopping Hours: 10 am - 10 pm from December 5 to 23

'FANTASTIC MAN' vs Diabolika, played by Vic Sotto and Ara Mina

Bitoy portrays mad scientist with a twist

MICHAEL V, writer, designer

MULTIAWARDED TV comedian Michael V. gives another hilarious performance in "Fantastic Man," OctoArts Films and M-Zet Productions' official entry in the Metro Manila Film Festival.

In the action-comedy-adventure, Michael, also known as Bitoy, plays Fantastic Man's creator, Prof. James Manalo, a mad scientist.

"Every time they describe a mad scientist, he always has to look old, with gray hair, and to look weird," says Michael, explaining the twist he gave to the character. "But I conceptualized a new look for a mad scientist. I made him hip and cool. Even his hair is very modern, very much like F4. He even has his own love team here, a lady robot he created named Faith."

Bitoy also had his hands full writing a few scenes and designing the costume for Ara Mina, who plays Diabolika.

"I wanted it to look so much like the character in the movie 'Species,' because Ara here is possessed by a monstrous alien," he says. "I also wanted the costume to capture her sexy curves. After all, she is still Ara Mina and she still has to look sexy even in an alien costume."

He was supposed to write the screenplay for the aborted sequel to "Lastikman," a big hit in last year's Metro Manila Film Festival. "I actually had everything ready," he says. "I even had a story board for all the big scenes. But things didn't go as planned so we aborted the sequel and created a new superhero, Fantastic Man.

Bitoy and Vic Sotto, who plays the title role, last worked together in "Lastikman."

"Fantastic Man" also stars Leo Martinez, Nanette Inventor, Jimmy Santos, Rudy Meyer, Dick Israel, Danica Sotto and Marissa Sanchez, and introducing Alicia Meyer and Valerie Concepcion. Joey de Leon appears in a very special guest role.

The movie is directed by Tony Y. Reyes.

BUSINESS

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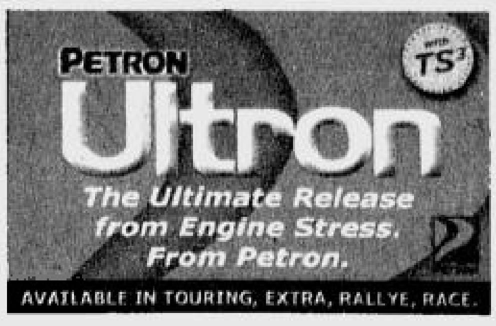
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Moody's says RP far from 'fiscal crisis'

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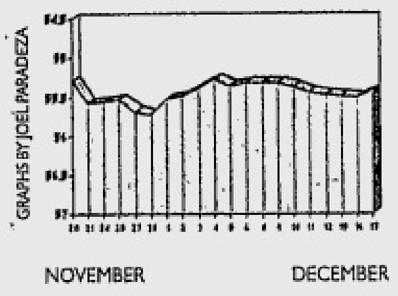


GRAPHS BY JOEL PARADEZA

PESO-DOLLAR RATE

₱ 55.42 = $ 1
As of 5 p.m., Dec. 17, 2003

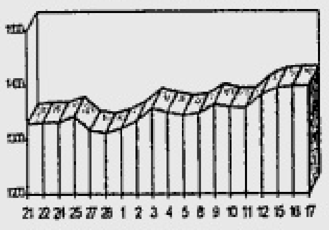
¥ 107.52 = $ 1
As of 5 p.m., Dec. 17, 2003

GOLD: $406.30-406.80
per ounce Hong Kong, Dec. 17, 2003

STOCK MARKET

Share prices close flat

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



(See stock market report on Page B2)

SHARE prices closed flat yesterday as profit-taking offset yearend window-dressing, dealers said.

They said the market was clearly winding down for the Christmas holidays but it should still manage to get through resistance at 1,400 points as fund managers look ahead to the new year.

The Philippine Stock Exchange composite index was down just 0.87 points to 1,398.56 after trading between 1,389.73 and 1,401.39. Gainers beat losers 28 to 22, with 54 stocks unchanged.

Volume was 273.55 million shares worth P613.03 million after 373.88 million shares worth P558.07 million Tuesday.

The all-shares index closed down 0.91 points at 846.38 but the commercial-industrial index gained 2.17 to 2,100.95. Property was down 8.81 at 559.63 and mining shed 22.29 to 1,602.77. Oil was unchanged at 1.23 while banking and financial services gained 2.78 to 437.13.

"With just five trading days before the end of the year, the mood has lightened. Everyone is in a pre-Christmas holiday mood," said Mark Alan Canizares of Citiseconline.com.

Dealers said they remain optimistic the market would end the year above the major psychological resistance level of 1,400, with fund managers expected to beef up the stocks they are holding ahead of next year.

China Bank was top-traded, gaining P10 to P670. Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. fell P20 to P880 while Globe Telecom gained P10 to P805. Ayala Corp. gained 10 centavos to P5.20. Manila Electric Co. saw its "B" shares, which are open to foreigners, rise 50 centavos to P24.25 while its "A" shares were unmoved at P14.75. *AFP*

By Clarissa S. Batino

GLOBAL credit rating firm Moody's Investors Service has assured investors that the Philippines was far from being in a fiscal crisis although the prevailing political risks remained a source of concern and would be a big factor to consider in the upcoming ratings review.

Moody's concluded its six-day assessment of the Philippines last Tuesday and its rating committee would decide in the first week of January whether to keep or downgrade the current rating of Ba1 for the country's long-term foreign currency rating.

Citing mounting political pressures, it warned on Nov. 26 that it might downgrade the Philippines' credit rating after revising its "stable" outlook on the country to "negative" in September. Standard & Poor's and Fitch Ratings have already downgraded their ratings on the country in the first half and have kept their "stable" outlook.

"I think Moody's came here with a negative bias because of the political noise but they left knowing that things aren't so bad. In fact, they were surprised with the statements made by former Finance Secretary (Jose Isidro) Camacho about the Philippines being in a fiscal crisis," according to Corazon Guidote, executive director of the country's Investor Relations Office.

Camacho said a week ago that the country was in a fiscal crisis, its level of debt could become unsustainable and that the current political system was not equipped to solve the problem.

"According to Moody's, a fiscal crisis means we would soon be defaulting on our loans and the numbers do not support such observation. Our debt has remained manageable and amortization actually peaked in 2002 and 2003. For next year, the government has already raised a big portion of its requirements," Guidote said in an interview.

The IRO executive director also criticized Camacho's negative comments, saying they were "inconsistent with what he did and stood for" when he was finance secretary and inconsiderate to the finance officials he left behind to continue the task.

Camacho's observations last week again jarred the peso, which had started to recover at that time. The peso closed at 55.42 to a dollar yesterday from 55.51 on Tuesday.

"I think our credit rating has a 50-50 chance of being downgraded or maintained. A downgrade is already discounted by the market while keeping the outlook would be a bonus for us. I think Moody's saw strength in the economy and

MOODY'S/B4

Gov't still expects 5.2% GDP growth in 2004

ROMULO Neri

BUCKING recommendations of the central bank to set more modest economic targets for next year, Economic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri yesterday said the government was sticking to its goal of a gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 4.9 to 5.8 percent in 2004.

Neri said the higher growth in 2004 would be achieved on the back of an anticipated rise in exports, a surge in farm output because of the absence of the disturbing El Niño weather phenomenon, a pick-up of the housing and construction sectors, and the sustained vibrancy of the services sector.

In 2004, he said the growth in gross national product (GNP) should be between 5.2 and 6 percent. This year, GDP is expected to reach the lower end of the 4.2- to 5.2-percent forecast.

Neri's fearless forecast was a 5.2-percent growth in GDP and 5.9 percent in GNP.

"There is no need to adjust the growth targets although I agree with the BSP that there is a need to look at potential problems. For me, the problems could be the deficit and its impact on interest rates as well as to investor confidence," said Neri, who is also concurrent director general of the National Economic and Development Authority.

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Rafael Buenaventura said the BSP was coming up with a conservative set of numbers for 2004 that would reflect modest growth expectations, a weaker peso, and higher interest rates.

"I think our estimate brought down the lower end of the target because this year we are only expecting a GDP growth of 4.2 percent. Although during an election year, we also expect increased domestic activity," Buenaventura said earlier.

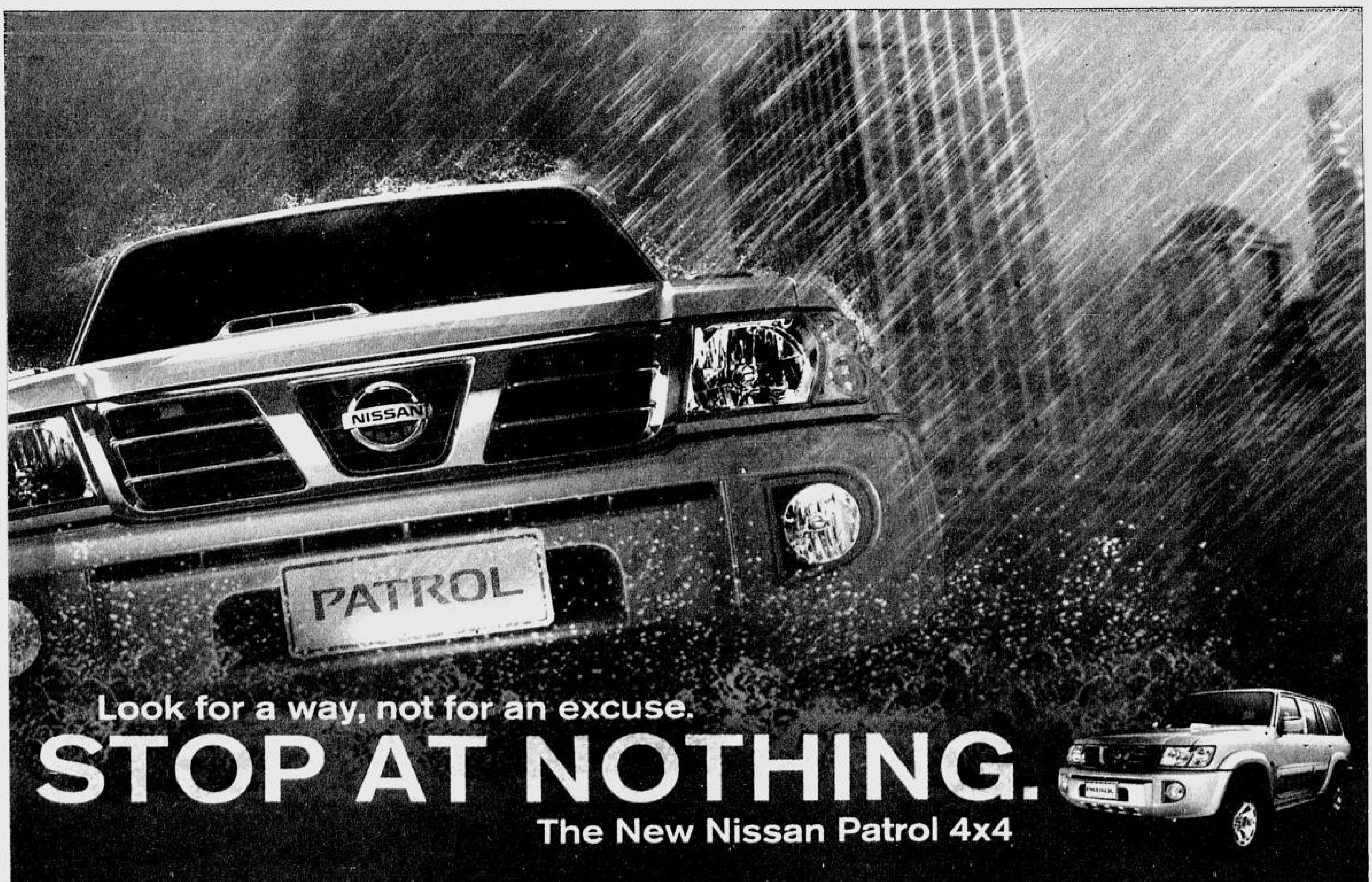
The BSP chief said a 4.5-percent GDP growth goal in 2004 would be more reasonable. He said the central bank would present the numbers to the inter-agency Development Budget Coordination Committee.

Buenaventura said the "very preliminary numbers" the central bank had drafted considered factors like the prevailing political uncertainties, relatively high oil prices, and a possible wage increase.

"We are still firming up the numbers for next year. They could still change but the general outlook has been factored in," said Buenaventura, stressing that the estimates were computed using a 10-percent estimated growth in exports and 11 percent in imports in 2004.

The BSP governor also said the peso could average at 55.50 to a dollar next year against the DBCC estimate of 53.50 to 54.50.

The benchmark 91-day treasury bill rate, used by banks in pricing their loans, could also average between 8 and 9 percent, according to Buenaventura. *Clarissa S. Batino*



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3 YEAR

Poorest for the trees

BREAKTIME

Conrado R. Banal III

THEY just don't get it. Whatever they say, we are still facing an economic crisis. The rush of good news we are getting, thanks to the election fever, just cannot change it.

The treasurer of the republic, for instance, proudly proclaimed that, this year, this cute administration of Gloriaetta can successfully contain the budget deficit.

That's another piece of good news. Because of brilliant fiscal management, the deficit this year can be "contained" to only an ugly monstrous P200 billion.

And they call it a big success! If we keep up the good work, in only 10 years, we are all dead. This, boss, is what the crisis is all about.

* * *

FOR nobody in this cute administration is telling us that, actually, in reality, we can never even just hope to keep on racking up such a huge deficit year in and year out.

Even our chief economic planner is trying to pass the blame to congressmen. He says they did not pass some tax measures because of lobby from big business.

Alright, admittedly, those in this evil big business have no right to fight government measures which can kill ... well, their own businesses.

Besides, the measures could have covered a couple of billions of the deficit. Okay, fine! That reduces the shortfall to just a couple of HUNDRED of billions.

* * *

THIS crisis is not just about one tax measure. And surely it is not only about one year of budget deficit. We are talking about the sickness here, not just the symptom.

That is the whole point of former Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho. Let me quality that "former." Actually, Camacho, ahh, "resigned." Perhaps in disgust!

Anyway, the economic crisis does not come about because of one year of bad government finances. The problem is, it has been bad for years and years now.

Worse, it is not going to become any better in the future. What's even worst is, well, it was all due to popularity ratings. Somebody was desperate for votes.

* * *

IF the leader only thinks of cuteness, like governance is a popularity contest, and the leader cannot ask the people to sacrifice, we can only expect big trouble (i.e. crisis).

And that's what Camacho was trying to say: We cannot go on like this, because we are living on borrowed time. And money! Trillions of borrowed money!

The point is sacrifice. Sacrifice is not good for popularity ratings. Nowhere is this more evident than in the policy of this cute administration in the power sector.

To gain in the ratings game, upon advice of Energy Secretary Vicent "the Silent" Perez, the Palace cut the power rates just like that.

It subsidized everybody, from the richest to the poorest, plus the birds and the bees, and the flowers and the trees, and of course all the air-conditioned malls.

* * *

YOU could hear the celebration in Malacañang when Gloriaetta's rating went up following the cut in the so-called PPA.

Nobody said anything about who would pay for the cut. It was not as if a part of the rate just disappeared to the farthest recesses of the galaxy.

I mean, somebody should still pay for it. Right—it is the government, through the bankrupt Napocor.

That's the point of Camacho. The power rate today does not represent the real cost of generation and distribution. That's why the sector is in a mess.

* * *

TODAY nobody can deny that the power rates are artificial. As Camacho sees it, power rates must go up before they can come down.

As it is, thanks to the subsidy, the government cannot hope to get out of the bankrupt Napocor, simply because nobody wants to buy into a big glob of a mess.

That's bad for government finances. Napocor is losing P110 billion a year. The losses are going to add on and on, until they bury us under a continent of debts.

So the government will be forced to absorb the losses of Napocor. At the same time, it cannot invest in the power sector. What's more, nobody else will.

That leads us to another case of severe power shortage. This, based on recent history, then gives the vultures, este, investors the chance to take advantage of us.

Because by then, at the height of the crisis, we will have to bite the rates they will demand, which will be somewhere up there in the mountains of Mars.

* * *

DONALD Dee, who is president of Ecop, or the Employers Confederation of the Philippines, finally made it to a list of prospective Cabinet members.

Sometimes known as The Donald, Dee is also known as one of the Three Stooges of highly politicized business organizations such as Ecop, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and their allied undertakings, este, groups.

The other two are

BREAKTIME/ B4

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CLUB	SELLER	BUYER
Alabang Country Club A/B'	1,300,000	1,150,000
Baguio Country Club	750,000	650,000
Canyon Woods	100,000	100,000
Camp John Hay	-	200,000
Capitol Hills	170,000	150,000
Calatagan Golf Club A/B''	70,000/Pls. Call	-
Cebu Country Club	-	1,230,000
Celebrity Sports Club	180,000	155,000
Club Filipino	160,000	-
Eagleridge A/B'/C''	300,000/450,000''	-
Eastridge A/B'	-	70,000/80,000'
Evercrest	100,000	-
Fontana D/C'/A''	70,000/140,000'/250,000''	-
Forest Hills A/B'/C''	190,000/220,000'/250,000''	190,000''
Manila Golf Ind./Corp.'	10,000,000/11,500,000'	9,450,000
Manila Polo	-	2,250,000
Manila Yacht Club	550,000	-
Manila Southwoods A/B'	410,000/500,000'	500,000'
Metropolitan Club	100,000	-
Mimosa Golf Ind./Corp.'	150,000	110,000/250,000'
Mt. Malarayat Ind./Corp.'	230,000/300,000'	-
Phil. Columbian	65,000	-
Puerto Azul A/B	100,000/150,000'	-
Quezon City Sports Club A	-	165,000
Riviera Golf A/B'/C''	140,000/150,000'/240,000''	-
Rockwell Leisure Club	330,000	-
Royale Tagaytay A/C'	Pls. Call	Pls. Call
Sherwoods A/B'/C''	70,000/Pls. Call'	-
Sta. Elena Golf A/B'	1,300,000/1,650,000'	-
Subic Bay Yacht Club (Corp.)	150,000	-
Tagaytay Country Club	340,000	-
Tagaytay Midlands	700,000	-
Tat Filipinas A	-	130,000
Valley Golf & CC	300,000	250,000
Wack-Wack Golf	Pls Call	6,300,000

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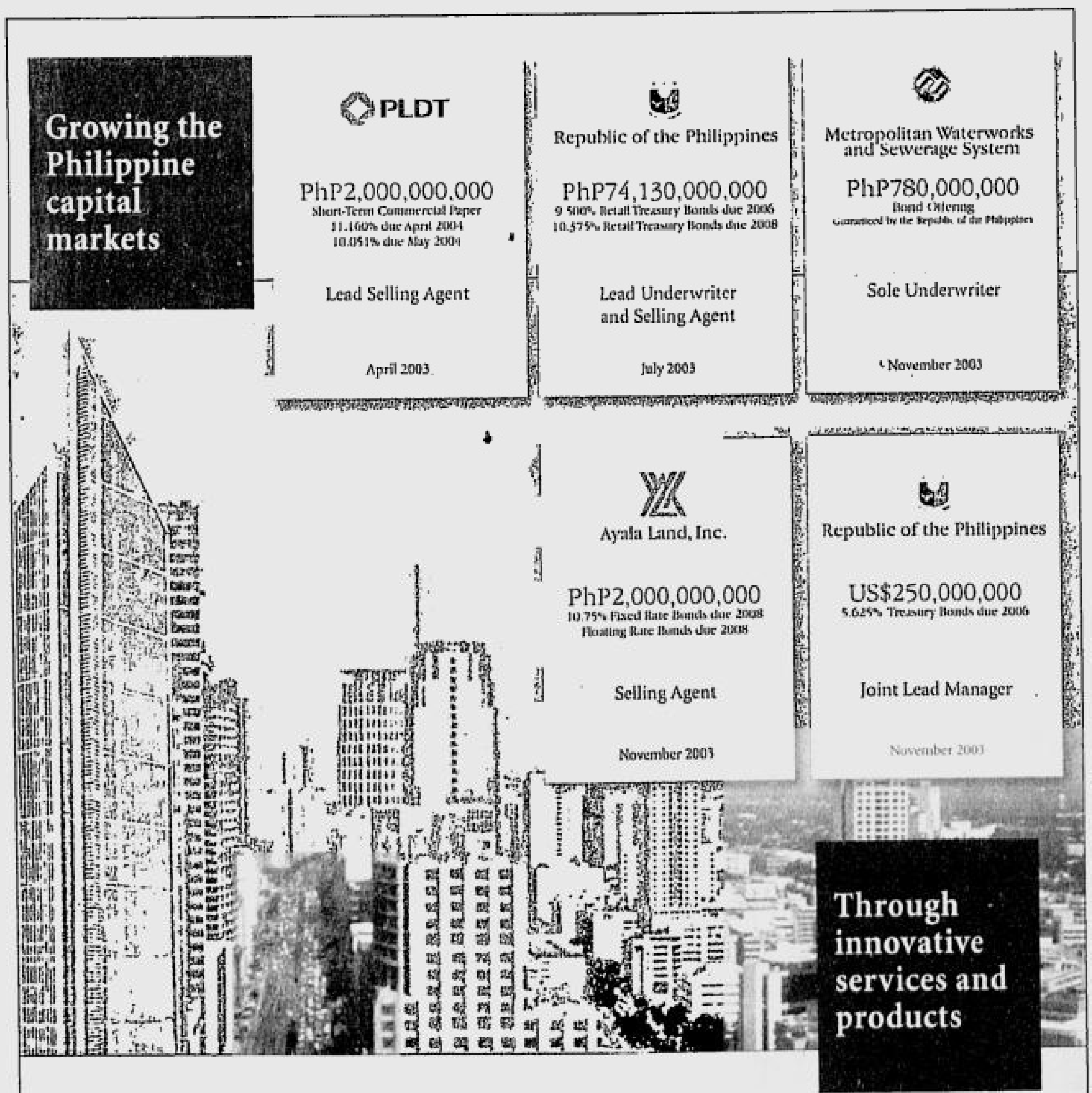

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PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of December 17, 2003)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	5,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	17.25	17.5	17	17	7,100
Bank of the Phil. Islands	46.5	46.5	46	46.5	93,600
China Banking Corp.	670	670	660	670	270,950
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	34	34.5	34	34.5	82,600
Export and Ind. Bank Inc.	0.49	0.51	0.48	0.5	1,730,000
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	27	27.5	27	27	263,500
Philippine National Bank	25	25	24.75	24.75	21,600
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	100
Security Bank Corp.	15.25	15.75	15	15.75	25,600
Union Bank of the Phil.	25	25.5	25	25	40,600
FINANCIAL SERVICES					
Bankard Inc.	1.2	1.24	1.2	1.24	32,000
First Abacus Financial	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.32	1,500,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	1700	1700	1700	1700	240
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.34	1.34	1.34	1.34	100,000
Sun Life Financial Inc.	1315	1315	1305	1310	1,640
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	25	25	25	25	1,500
Diversified Fin. Network	2	2	2	2	10,000
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	0.68	0.69	0.67	0.69	350,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	795	805	795	805	73,910
Island Info and Tech Inc.	0.045	0.045	0.045	0.045	6,500,000
ISM Communications Corp.	0.041	0.041	0.04	0.04	900,000
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp.	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	14,000
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	0.89	0.9	0.89	0.89	7,170,000
Transpacific Broadcast	1.38	1.38	1.38	1.38	50,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	900	905	880	880	129,140
Philweb Corp.	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	7,000,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. A	14.75	14.75	14.5	14.75	94,700
Manila Electric Co B	23.75	24.25	23.75	24.25	2,196,000
Petron Corp.	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	3,382,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.92	10,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Asian Terminals Inc.	1.32	1.32	1.32	1.32	30,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	3.2	3.35	3.2	3.3	3,765,000
William, Gothong & Aboitiz	2.04	2.04	2.04	2.04	1,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Engineering Equip. Inc.	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	210,000
Republic Cement Corp.	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	80,000
Republic Glass Hldg. Corp	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	517,000
Union Cement Corp.	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	7,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	3.15	3.15	3.15	3.15	63,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	30.5	30.5	30	30	8,100
Jollibee Foods Corp.	16.75	17.25	16.75	17.25	819,000
San Miguel Corp. A	54	54.5	54	54.5	76,000
San Miguel Corp. B	62.5	63	62	63	69,000
Vitarich Corp.	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	490,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Ayala Corp.	5.1	5.2	5	5.2	10,731,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	3.15	3.15	3.15	3.15	881,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.006	2,000,000
ATN Holdings Inc.	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	10,000
Boulevard Holdings Inc.	0.085	0.085	0.085	0.085	100,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.46	0.47	0.46	0.47	570,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	250,000
Southeast Asian Cement	0.045	0.046	0.045	0.045	700,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	0.28	0.28	0.27	0.27	240,000
Ever-Gotesco Resources	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	4,200,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	18.25	18.5	18.25	18.25	627,700
Global Equities Inc.	0.0625	0.065	0.0625	0.0625	1,400,000
Ionics Inc.	1.46	1.46	1.46	1.46	11,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	1.98	1.98	1.98	1.98	20,000
Macroasia Corp.	0.61	0.61	0.6	0.61	60,000
Medco Holdings	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	350,000
Megaworld Corp.	1.02	1.04	1.02	1.04	878,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.26	0.27	0.26	0.27	1,660,000
Music Corp.	0.36	0.36	0.35	0.36	550,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	0.96	0.96	0.96	0.96	200,000
South China Resources Inc.	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	100,000
Wellex Industries Inc.	0.34	0.35	0.34	0.35	110,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.38	0.4	0.38	0.4	140,000
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Corro-Coat Inc.	1.46	1.46	1.46	1.46	6,000
Metro Alliance Hldgs B	0.66	0.66	0.66	0.66	150,000
Mabuhay Vinyl Corp.	1	1.26	1	1.26	40,000
Picop Resources Inc.	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	100,000
Prime Gaming Phils. Inc.	20	20	20	20	43,200
SPI Technologies Inc.	11.75	11.75	11.75	11.75	39,000
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICES					
Belle Corp.	0.56	0.58	0.56	0.58	750,000
Mondragon Intl Phils. Inc.	0.165	0.165	0.165	0.165	50,000
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp (Pdr)	25	25.5	25	25.5	821,100
DMCI Holdings Inc- Pref.	775	775	775	775	6,400
PLDT (10% Pref) Series N	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	800
PLDT (10% Pref) Series Q	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	300
PLDT (10% Pref) Series T	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	400
PLDT (10% Pref.) Series U	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	300
PLDT (10% Pref) Series V	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	2,200
PLDT (10% Pref) Series W	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	10,000
PLDT (10% Pref) Series Z	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	2,400
PLDT 10% Pref Series Aa	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	1,800
OTHERS					
Centro Escolar University	6.2	6.2	6.2	6.2	4,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	6	6	5.9	5.9	1,342,000
C&P Homes Inc.	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	450,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.14	0.145	0.14	0.145	1,100,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.205	0.205	0.205	0.205	40,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.04	1.04	1.02	1.04	3,889,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	620,000
Robinsons Land Corp.	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	32,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	6.4	6.4	6.3	6.4	2,715,000
MINING					
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	1	1	1	1	20,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.225	0.225	0.22	0.225	620,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.29	2,430,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	20,000,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	5,000,000
Omico Corp.	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	2,000,000
Philex Mining Corp. A	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	40,000
Philex Mining Corp. B	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	70,000
OIL					
Imperial Res.	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	30,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.003	0.003	0.003	0.003	137,000,000

	SHARES	VALUE(P)
Bank & Fin Svc	4,174,530	201,797,210.00
Comm'l & Ind'l	61,832,950	379,490,425.00
PRO	10,188,000	29,717,030.00
Mining	30,180,000	1,105,400.00
OIL	167,000,000	741,000.00
GRAND TOTALS :	273,375,480	612,851,065.00

	AVERAGES	
Bank & Fin Svc	437.13	UP 2.78
Comm'l & Ind'l	2,100.95	UP 2.17
PRO	559.63	DOWN 8.81
Mining	1,602.77	DOWN 22.29
OIL	1.23	UNCH 0.00
SME	100.00	UNCH 0.00
All Shares Index	846.38	DOWN 0.91
Composite	1,398.56	DOWN 0.87

NO. OF ADVANCES: 28, NO. OF DECLINES: 22, NO. OF UNCHANGED: 54, NO. OF TRADED ISSUES: 104, NO. OF TRADES: 1,387

DISCLOSURES

EQUITABLE PCI Bank Inc. scheduled its annual stockholders' meeting on April 20 with record date on Jan. 15. The board approved the promotion of Walter Wassmer as senior vice president, head of corporate banking group.

* * *

INTERPHIL Laboratories Inc. bought 12,000 of its B shares at P1.90 each.

* * *

THE BOARD of **iPeople Inc.** approved the acquisition of 70 percent of the total outstanding shares of Pan Pacific Computer Center Inc.

* * *

PCI Leasing and Finance Inc. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on April 21 with record date on Jan. 15.

* * *

FIRST Philippine Holdings Corp. disclosed the resignation of Roderico Puno as vice president of the company. ***Compiled by Maricar D. Tolosa, PDI Research***

CURRENCIES

December 17, 2003

Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.811293	1.000000	55.534000
Japan	Yen	0.007547	0.009303	0.516600
United Kingdom	Pound	1.422684	1.753600	97.384400
Hongkong	Dollar	0.104514	0.128824	7.154100
Switzerland	Franc	0.643986	0.793777	44.081600
Canada	Dollar	0.611144	0.753296	41.833500
Singapore	Dollar	0.475525	0.586132	32.550300
Australia	Dollar	0.603461	0.743826	41.307600
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.152086	2.652661	147.312900
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.216339	0.266660	14.808700
Brunei	Dollar	0.474135	0.584419	32.455100
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000096	0.000118	0.006600
Thailand	Baht	0.020503	0.025272	1.403500
UAE	Dirham	0.220898	0.272279	15.120700
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.232600	68.451200
Argentina	Peso	0.273162	0.336700	18.698300
Brazil	Real	0.277081	0.341530	18.966500
Denmark	Kroner	0.134369	0.165623	9.197700
India	Rupee	0.017831	0.021978	1.220500
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.213527	0.263193	14.616200
Mexico	New Peso	0.072013	0.088763	4.929400
New Zealand	Dollar	0.528151	0.650999	36.152600
Norway	Kroner	0.121623	0.149912	8.325200
Pakistan	Rupee	0.014198	0.017501	0.971900
South Africa	Rand	0.127964	0.157729	8.759300
Korea	Won	0.000681	0.000840	0.046600
Sweden	Kroner	0.110798	0.136569	7.584200
Syria	Pound	0.018489	0.022789	1.265600
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.023918	0.029481	1.637200
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.000509	0.000627	0.034800

Stanchart proposes settlement with SEC

UK-BASED Standard Chartered Bank asked the Securities and Exchange Commission last Monday to lift an order preventing the bank from selling unregistered global mutual fund products, saying that it no longer offers these products to its clients.

Stanchart also reiterated its offer to enter into an amicable settlement with the Commission on the condition that it would involve no admission of fault on the bank's part.

The foreign bank also asked the SEC to issue a statement saying that, if at all there was a violation of the country's laws, the responsibility lies with the bank's former trust department head and not the bank itself.

Stanchart also wanted the SEC to state that the order was issued ex parte - without hearing - and before the SEC's compliance and enforcement department could fully hear the side of the bank.

Stanchart said that it had officially withdrawn from its trust clients the option to invest in Global Third Party Requested Funds, the alleged unregistered securities, as of November 1999.

Early this month, the SEC ordered Stanchart to immediately cease and desist from further offering, soliciting or selling unregistered securities to the public after the corporate watchdog's investigation concluded that the foreign bank had been engaged in the alleged illegal activity to the detriment of the investing public.

In its CDO against Stanchart, the Commission noted: "A careful perusal of the records of the case shows that Standard Chartered Bank is not merely disseminating information but is engaging in the business of selling Global Third Party Mutual Funds to the public."

The bank offered the overseas mutual funds despite a directive from the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas directing it to stop. The SEC added that Stanchart offered the securities even with full knowledge that prior registration of the funds was required.

The SEC recalled that as early as 1997 it had received complaints against Stanchart for selling securities without prior registration through the offer of international mutual funds.

A year later, the bank assured the then Finance Secretary that the bank had withdrawn the product and this would not be offered again until property clearances were obtained.

In 1999, the bank inquired from the BSP whether foreign funds could be included in a trust portfolio upon a client's directive. In response, the BSP directed the bank not to include investment in global mutual funds issued abroad in the trust portfolio unless these were registered with the Commission.

Elena R. Torrijos

UCPB board OKs business plan

By Elena R. Torrijos

THE BOARD of the United Coconut Planters Bank has approved in principle the bank's proposed 10-year business plan that calls for an aggressive build-up in deposits and a significant reduction in the bank's non-performing assets.

"I think we have a very good plan," UCPB chair Deogracias Vistan said.

A person familiar with the matter said the plan envisioned a positive net income in 2006 after expected losses in 2004 and 2005.

The business plan assumes that the bank would be able to recover next year some P27.5 billion in deposits and sell its entire portfolio of non-performing loans by 2005.

Last month, UCPB president and chief executive Jose Querubin said that after three consecutive years of losses, UCPB had swung to a profit of P5 billion in the first eight months of this year, primarily due to a one-time gain from the implementation of PDIC's P20-billion rehabilitation package for the bank.

Under the financial assistance package agreement signed with UCPB last July, the PDIC agreed to buy P13 billion of the bank's bad loans and extend a 10-year loan convertible to equity.

UCPB has been under government sequestration for more than a decade and has been suffering losses because of its non-performing assets.

Querubin had earlier said that the bank's non-performing assets settled to around 30 percent of total assets or P30 billion, of which P20 billion was in real and other property owned or acquired and P10 billion in bad loans.

As of the end of last year, UCPB's bad assets represented around 40 percent of total resources.

UCPB's business plan would be submitted to the PDIC and the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' Monetary Board before the end of the year, an official from PDIC said.

PSE bans trading of stocks held by ACE

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange has banned the trading or transfer of all stocks held by beleaguered Asian Capital Equities Inc., in accordance with a takeover order approved by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

In a memorandum to brokers dated Dec. 15, the PSE said it had been directed to preserve the assets of ACE for the protection of the clients' interests.

"In this regard, PSE shares in the name of Asian Capital Equities Inc. cannot be traded, transferred or conveyed in any manner or form until after all its liabilities to all clients have been settled," the PSE ordered.

Traders were also directed to report to the PSE's compliance and surveillance group any query or attempt to sell these shares.

This developed as the PSE complained of difficulties in getting hold of pertinent company documents. The SEC thus gave it the authority to take over the brokerage house, which was accused of fraud and other violations of the Securities Regulation Code.

ACE's management led by controversial stock broker Frank Borromeo failed to show up during the hearing scheduled by the SEC.

The PSE found out that the stock brokerage had incurred a negative net worth of P65 million as of Sept. 30.

It further discovered that while ACE had an excess net capital of P3.7 million, its net capital deficiency would have amounted to P73.56 million if not for subordinated loan amounting to P77 million.

ACE was forced to suspend its operations because of its failure to put up additional capital.

Based on the evidence and supporting documents filed by the PSE at the SEC, ACE was accused of four counts of SRC violations.

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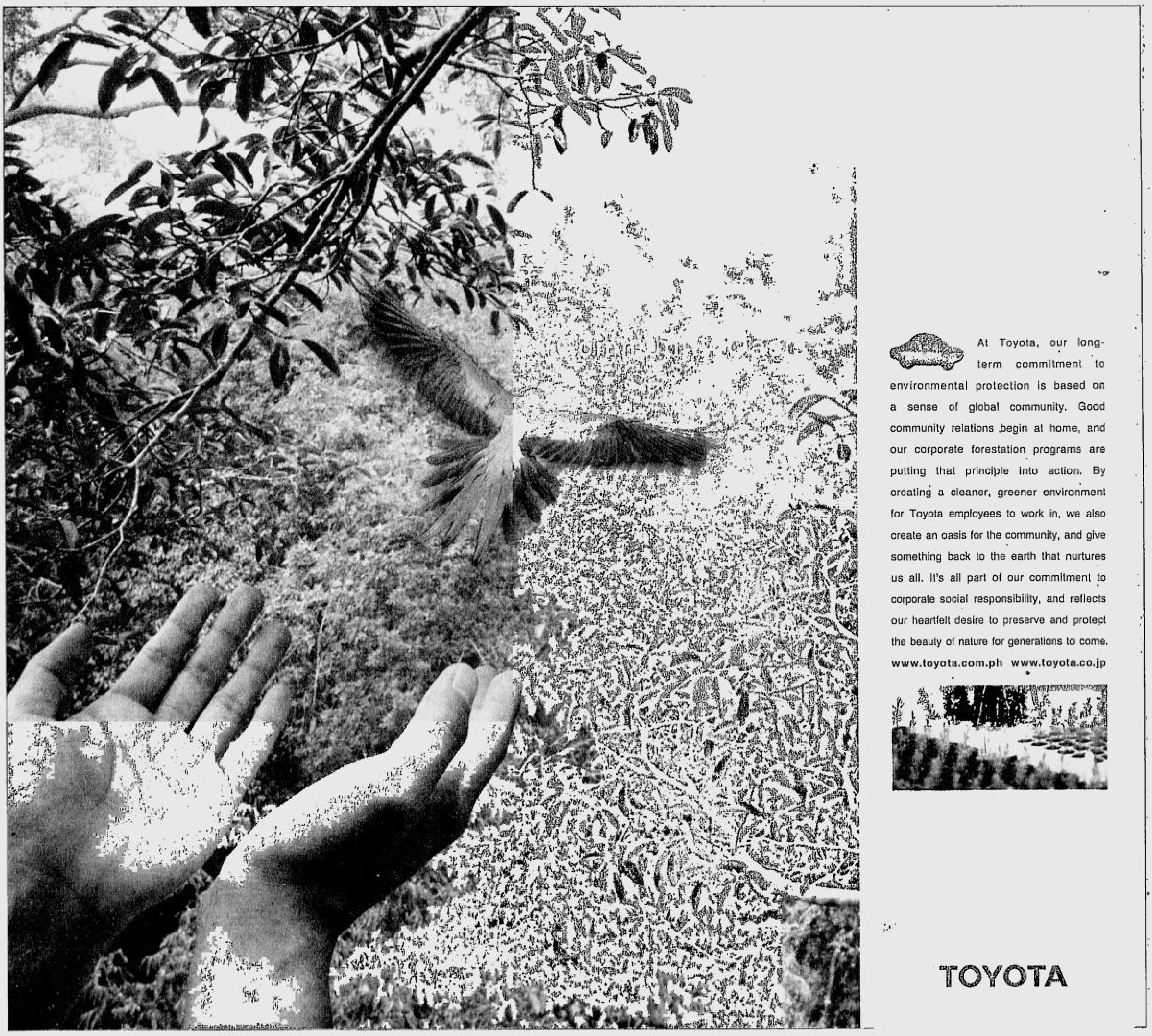

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Moody's says RP far from 'fiscal crisis'

From page B1

confined its concerns to the political situation," Guidote said.

Aside from economic officials, Moody's also met with heads of big companies as well as politicians to get a clearer picture of the situation.

The rating firm met with officials of Ayala Corp., JG Summit, SM Prime, Lufthansa Technique, Texas Instruments, Intel, Timex, and Moog Corp., among others. Moody's officials also met with politicians like Sen. Edgardo Angara.

Guidote said Moody's also flagged as a concern the external sector and its impact on the government's ability to maintain a decent level of foreign exchange reserves. Exports were lackluster this year and would likely grow by less than 2 percent but the government said the sector should recover and expand by 10 percent in 2004.

"Moody's had a chance to meet with the companies and saw that most firms were profitable. I think they also saw that the country's export base had remained stable although there is a need to broaden the IT base," she added.

Government officials said they hoped that the New York-based rating firm could still be convinced to keep its rating of "Ba1" on the back of improving economic numbers and continuing fiscal consolidation.

"Our economic fundamentals remain sound. The government had assured that it is committed to the fiscal program of reducing the budget deficit. We hope more positive developments could forestall any downgrade," Buenaventura said earlier.

Guidote said she hoped that Moody's could distinguish between temporary political pressures and sustainable economic fundamentals.

Breaktime

From page B2

Miguel Varela and Sergio Luis "hyphen" Ortiz, who never hesitate to express their views on anything at all, including the candidacy of FPJ.

Anyway, The Donald was said to be among the prospects of Gloriaetta to take the place of Trade and Industry Secretary Manuel A. Roxas.

Luckily, based on reports, Gloriaetta already chose the brilliant head of SGV, Cesar Purisima, who now has all of six months to perform a miracle at DTI.

* * *

ALL of a sudden, just when his name was mentioned as a prospective Cabinet member, finally, his past came to haunt The Donald.

The Palace read all about the news of his past business dealings, particularly the long delayed project called True North Golf and Country Club.

A few years ago, it seemed a company called Sacobia Hills Development Corp. leased a 120-hectare property from Clark Development Corp.

Sacobia promised to develop it into the True North gold course. Chair of Sacobia was The Donald. Also, he took care of the money. He was the treasurer.

* * *

NOW it turned out that True North was selling shares to the public, even without a license from the Securities and Exchange Commission. SEC reports noted that the selling arm was a firm called Century Properties, which already amassed something like P750 million.

True North, it also turned out, had a capital of only P2 million. Moreover, it did not have any claim to the lease with CDC, which belonged to Sacobia.

Yet what was sold to the public were shares in True North. The SEC smelled something fishy. It ordered Sacobia and Century Properties to clean up their mess.

* * *

YOU see, out of the P750 million worth of shares in the golf club, Century Properties already got payment of more than P300 million.

Moreover, Century Properties deposited the money with a bank called Export Import Bank, under its own name, using the account number 5101-00020-8.

As it turned out, the chair and treasurer of Sacobia, The Donald, was also the vice chair of Export Import Bank. When it became clear that the golf project was not getting anywhere, despite the P300 million in the bank, a few buyers withdrew from the project.

* * *

BUT then CDC also was not getting any lease rental from Sacobia. CDC also worried that the completion of the golf course was long overdue. Some buyers of the True North golf shares also filed cases against Sacobia, complaining about the non-completion of the 18-hole gold course.

The company then promised CDC that it would complete the golf course by June 2001, which was three and a half years ago, and until now—you guessed it—nothing moves there, not even the worms!

Among the disgruntled investor in Sacobia is Global Equities, which is headed by Nora Bitong, who is not without connections in business and politics.

Department of
Environment and
Natural Resource

dti
TRADE & INDUSTRY
Department of
Trade and Industry

Department of
Transportation and
Communications

DENR-DTI-DOTC JOINT ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER NO. 1
SERIES OF 2003

SUBJECT : GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE MONITORING OF ACCREDITED AND AUTHORIZED PRIVATE EMISSION TESTING CENTERS (PETC) AND LTO EMISSION TESTING ACTIVITIES

Section 1 - Authority

1.1 *WHEREAS*, Section 21 of Republic Act 8749 also known as the Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999 mandates the DOTC, together with the DTI and the DENR, to establish the procedures for the inspection of motor vehicles and the testing of their emissions;

1.2 *WHEREAS*, the same section empowers the DOTC to authorize private emission testing centers duly accredited by the DTI;

1.3 *WHEREAS*, under Section 3, Rule 34 of the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Clean Air Act of 1999, the DENR has the responsibility of regulating specifications of the emission testing equipment to be used in conducting emission tests;

1.4 WHEREAS, under Section 8, Rule 35 of the IRR of the CAA, the DENR, through, the Bureau, shall certify conformity to standards of emission test equipment before it can be used for mandatory emission tests.

1.5 *WHEREAS*, Section 35 of DTI-DOTC Joint Administrative Order (JAO) No. 01, Series of 2001 "Guidelines for Accreditation and Authorization of Vehicle Emission Testing Centers" states that "DTI and DOTC/LTO shall undertake joint monitoring and inspection activity on all accredited and authorized Private Emission Testing Centers (PETC)"; and

In consideration of the above premises, the following are hereby prescribed for the compliance, information, and guidance of all concerned.

Section 2 – Objectives

The objective of this Order is to ensure that emission testing prior to renewal of motor vehicle registration, redemption of confiscated license plate(s), and registration of imported used and rebuilt vehicles, as required by the Clean Air Act of 1999, is properly implemented. Specifically this Order aims to:

2.1 Monitor and ensure compliance of PETCs and LTO Emission Testing activities with the provisions of the Clean Air Act of 1999, with Articles 4 to 9 of the DTI-DOTC JAO No. 1, Series of 2001, and with other relevant orders, rules and regulations set by the DENR, DOTC and DTI.

2.2 Ensure that no motor vehicle will be registered without undergoing and passing the emission test as required by the Clean Air Act.

2.3 Ensure the integrity of the emission test as reflected in the official DOTC Certificate of Emission Compliance (CEC).

Section 3 – Scope

This Order establishes guidelines and procedures for the following:

3.1 Monitoring the compliance of accredited and authorized PETCs and LTO Emission Testing activities with pertinent provisions of the Clean Air Act of 1999 and DTI-DOTC JAO No. 1, series of 2001; and

3.2 Monitoring of the implementation of emission testing prior to registration requirement of the Clean Air Act.

This Order is hereby issued without prejudice to the accreditation and authorization powers of DTI and DOTC, respectively.

Section 4 – Definition

For purposes of this Order and as used herein, the following definitions are hereby adopted:

CAA	– Philippine Clean Air Act of 1999 or Republic Act 8749
CEC	– Certificate of Emission Compliance
DENR	– Department of Environment and Natural Resources
DOTC	– Department of Transportation and Communications
DTI	– Department of Trade and Industry
Flagged	– A PETC or LTO District Office tagged for monitoring based on the criteria provided herein.
Irregularities	– Deviations from the accreditation and authorization terms and conditions and from emission test protocols
IT Provider	– Information Technology company that provides electronic data services
LGU	– Local Government Unit
LTO	– Land Transportation Office
MMDA	– Metro Manila Development Authority
NGO	– Non-Government Organization
Non-Appearance tual	– Generation of a test result without conducting actual emission test
PETC	– Private Emission Testing Center
Reference Test Result	– Test result obtained from an emission test conducted on the Test Vehicle by an accredited and authorized PETC.
Test Vehicle	– A vehicle with a verified emission test result
Volunteer mem	– An individual from an NGO who intends to be a ber of a Monitoring Team

Section 5 – Organization

5.1 Monitoring Committee

A Monitoring Committee composed of the DOTC Undersecretary for Land Transportation as chairperson, and the DTI Undersecretary for Consumer Welfare and Trade Regulation Group and a DENR Undersecretary as members is hereby created. The Monitoring Committee shall ensure the proper implementation of this Order.

5.2 Monitoring Team

The Monitoring Committee shall create Monitoring Teams, which shall conduct the actual monitoring activities.

A team shall be composed of at least four (4) members:

- A representative from the DOTC, who shall be the team leader;
- A representative from the DTI;
- At least one (1) representative from either the DENR or MMDA (for Metro Manila) or LGU where the PETC is located; and
- At least one (1) from the NGO or media.

Representatives of LTO, transport operators, PETC operators and/or the Ombudsman may be invited as observers when necessary.

5.2.1 Responsibilities of the Monitoring Team

The Monitoring Team shall have the following responsibilities:

- Review pertinent documents pertaining to the PETC/LTO Testing Center to be visited before the actual monitoring;
- Prepare detailed procedures for monitoring subject to the approval of the Monitoring Committee;
- Conduct monitoring activities of PETC/LTO Testing Center; and
- Prepare and submit to the Monitoring Committee its monitoring report within seven days after the conduct of monitoring activities.

The Team Leader of the Monitoring Team shall have the following responsibilities:

- Inform team members of the schedule of monitoring activities;
- Conduct a brief pre-monitoring meeting with team members;
- Provide documents to be used by the team during onsite monitoring;
- Conduct a brief post monitoring meeting with team members; and
- Assign tasks to each team member.

The Team Members shall have the following responsibilities:

- Perform assigned tasks in the monitoring; and
- Report his/her findings and observations to the team during the post monitoring meeting.

5.2.2 Qualifications of Monitoring Team Members

Members of the Monitoring Teams from Government Agencies shall undergo Training on Monitoring Procedures to be conducted by the DOTC. Volunteers shall be required to file an application for membership in the Monitoring Teams and undergo Training on Monitoring Procedures. The Training Module and Applications for membership shall be approved by the Monitoring Committee.

5.3 Secretariat

A secretariat shall be established at the DOTC, composed of DOTC personnel, whose main function is to assist the Monitoring Committee and Teams in accepting and documenting complaints, records keeping, and coordinating activities pertinent to the provisions of this Order.

Section 6 – Regular On-Site Inspection and Monitoring of PETC

The Monitoring Team shall inform the PETC operator that an on-site inspection shall be conducted.

The following information/documents shall be required from the PETC operator:

- Valid PETC accreditation and authorization
- Record of CEC issued for the month being monitored including copies of receipts issued
- Calibration certificate of test equipment
- Valid technician authorization
- Test equipment interfaced with the PETC-IT system
- Serial number of test equipment that corresponds to the accreditation record

The PETC technician shall be required to conduct an emission test of the test vehicle. The result of the test conducted shall be compared to reference test results. Discrepancy in test results, passed when actually failed or vice-versa, shall mean that a violation was committed.

Section 7 – Procedure for Identification and Monitoring of Irregularities

7.1 Basis for Monitoring of PETC and LTO-Testing Center

The following shall be the basis for flagging a PETC and/or LTO-Testing Center for monitoring:

1. Five (5) verbal complaints or one written and verified report of irregularities received against a PETC or LTO-Testing Center.
2. Unusually high or low rate of vehicles passing/failing the emission tests.
3. Discrepancies in the number of CECs issued by the PETCs or LTO Testing Center and the number of motor vehicle registrations issued by an LTO-DO on a per month basis.

7.2 Complaints and Reports of Irregularities

All complaints and reports of irregularities shall be documented by the Secretariat. Government agencies that receive complaints or reports of irregularities against a PETC or LTO-Testing Center emission testing activity shall forward the same to the Secretariat for information and proper coordination of actions to be taken on said complaint. Any monitoring report shall be referred by the Committee to the appropriate government agency for proper adjudication of the case. Actions taken by other agencies shall be reported to the Secretariat. The report shall contain the following: the name of the PETC or LTO-Testing Center, the specific complaint, the name of the complainant and contact number. The Secretariat shall regularly submit to the Monitoring Committee a summary of the complaints received that contains a list of PETC and LTO-Testing Center that must be monitored.

The monitoring Committee shall ensure that no violations as hereto presented below and in Annexes I and II are committed by PETCs or LTO-Testing Centers.

7.3 Discrepancies in Number of CEC and motor vehicle registration Issued

7.3.1 The Information Technology (IT) providers of the PETC and LTO-Testing Center shall furnish the Secretariat monthly report on the number of vehicle tested and CECs issued.

7.3.2 The LTO shall provide the Secretariat monthly reports on the number of motor vehicles registration issued per LTO-DO.

7.3.3 The above information shall be forwarded by DOTC to the Secretariat, which shall compare the above data. The Secretariat shall regularly submit to the Monitoring Committee a summary of the information and the list of PETC and LTO-Testing Center that must be monitored.

7.4 Monitoring Procedure for Reported Tampering of Test Results by PETC and LTO

7.4.1 Roadside Monitoring

A monitoring team shall be dispatched to the vicinity of a flagged testing center. A vehicle that has just completed the emission test shall be flagged down by the Monitoring Team and subjected to emission test. The result of the test conducted by the Monitoring Team shall be compared with the test result conducted in the PETC/LTO Testing Center. This process shall be repeated until a total of three (3) vehicles tested have shown a large discrepancy in the test result or proven to be tampered.

7.4.2 Monitoring Using a Test Vehicle

The Monitoring Team shall dispatch a test vehicle to the flagged testing center for emission testing just like an ordinary vehicle owner seeking an emission test. The result of the test conducted by the test center shall be compared with the reference test results of the test vehicle.

If comparison of test results shows large discrepancy (passed when actually failed or vice versa), then a violation was committed.

7.4.3 On-Site Inspection

The Monitoring Team shall inform the PETC operator/LTO Testing Center of the complaints and/or alleged violations and that an on-site inspection shall be conducted by the Team following the procedures enumerated herein.

7.5 Monitoring Procedure for Reported Issuance of CECs without Actual Emission Test (Non-Appearance)

The Monitoring Team shall verify the actual number of vehicles tested by the PETC or LTO Testing Center by discreetly posting personnel who shall conduct actual count of vehicles tested for at least one day. The personnel shall report the number of vehicles to the Monitoring Team. This information is compared with the number of CECs issued by the PETC for that specific day.

If the number of CECs issued is greater than the number of vehicles that entered a particular PETC, then a violation was committed.

7.6 Monitoring Procedure for Reported Registration of Vehicles Without Actual Emission Test (Non-Appearance)

The Monitoring Team shall verify the actual number of vehicles tested by a PETC or LTO Testing Center by discreetly posting personnel who shall conduct actual count of vehicles tested for at least one day. The personnel shall report the number of vehicles to the Monitoring Team. This information is compared with the number of registration for that specific day.

If the number of vehicle registered is greater than the number of vehicles counted plus CEC received, then a violation was committed.

7.7 Flexibility of Operations

The Monitoring Team with the approval of the Monitoring Committee may implement other means, such as but not limited to entrapment operations, necessary to prove the irregularities committed by the PETC or LTO-DO.

Section 8 - Reporting

The Monitoring Team shall furnish the Monitoring Committee a Monitoring Report and Recommendations within seven (7) working days after the conclusion of the monitoring.

Section 9 - Budget

Budget for the operationalization of this Order shall be charged against the Air Quality Management Fund (AQMF) or other sources.

Section 10 - Penalties

10.1 Government Personnel

DOTC, LTO, DTI and DENR personnel found to have committed any violation of the provisions of the Clean Air Act and its Implementing Rules and Regulations shall be investigated by their respective Departments for corresponding administrative sanctions and by the Ombudsman for criminal liability

10.2 PETC Operator

PETC operator and personnel found to have committed irregularities shall be penalized in accordance with Section 46 of the CAA, Section 45 of the DTI-DOTC JAO No. 01 Series of 2001 and DTI DAO 3, 2002.

Section 11 – Repealing Clause

All orders, memoranda, and issuances found inconsistent with this Order are hereby modified or revoked accordingly.

Section 12 - Effectivity

This Order shall take effect after 15 days, following the publication of its full text in a newspaper of general circulation.

The original copy of this Order shall be filed and kept in the DTI-General Administrative Services (DTI-GAS). Three (3) certified copies of this Order shall be filed with the UP Law Center by the DTI-GAS within seven (7) days after the Order is signed.

Signed this 7th day of November 2003.

ELISEA G. GOZUN	LEANDRO R. MENDOZA	MANUEL A. ROXAS II
Department of Environment and Natural Resources	Department of Transportation and Communications	Department of Trade and Industry

ANNEX I: PETC AUTHORIZATION VIOLATIONS (DOTC)

1. Operating with expired or invalid authorization.
2. Operating with expired or invalid technician authorization.
3. Operating using uncertified testing equipment.
4. Operating without using **Real Time Data Storing and Retrieval System** (IT components).
5. Operating with test equipment not interfaced with IT system.
6. Operating vehicle repair (maintenance) and / or related vehicle engine enhancement activities.
7. Operating a center not capable of administering tests for all types/classes of vehicles.
8. Operating in violation of the "service area" concept.
9. Falsification of test results including "non-appearance".
10. Failure to transmit real time inspection results to LTO.
11. Issuing fake Certificate of Emission Compliance (CEC).
12. Conducting test inconsistent with test procedures.
13. All other practices that are deemed inconsistent with the DOTC/LTO Authorization Guidelines.

ANNEX II: PETC ACCREDITATION VIOLATIONS (DTI)

1. Operating a PETC or engaging in emission testing business with invalid accreditation.
2. Operating without necessary business and/or mayor's permits.
3. PETCs (permanent site or mobile) engaging in activities outside the scope of the accreditation.
4. Employment of technicians not TESDA certified..
5. Personnel not qualified based on appropriate education, training, experience and/or demonstrated skill.
6. PETC work area does not meet maneuvering area of at least 6 m wide and 6 m long per proposed number of vehicles to be inspected at any given time.
7. Any changes in the original state of the PETC facility that do not satisfy the requirements on accreditation.
8. Operating without the required equipment (i.e. gas analyser for gasoline-fuelled vehicles and opacimeter for diesel-fuelled vehicles).
9. Equipment not certified by the DENR.
10. Equipment not properly calibrated.
11. Equipment and its software not capable of achieving the accuracy required and do not comply with specifications relevant to the tests.
12. Test methods/procedures not as required in the Clean Air Act of 1999 (Annex B and Annex C).
13. Test report / certificates not containing the minimum requirements as required in DAO 03, 2002, sub-clause 7.6.
14. Obstructing or attempting to obstruct inspection by the Assessment Team or visits by the authorized representative of DTI.
15. Signboard, certificate of accreditation, and fees not properly displayed in the PETC area.
16. PETC not reporting to DTI any change of information related to PETC.
17. Non-compliance with other requirements of the DTI PETC accreditation.

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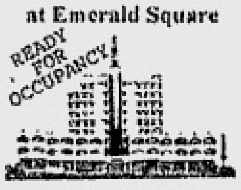
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INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY SCREENING AND TO BID

Date: December 10, 2003
Contract No. BCMD.2003-007

1. Contract No.: BCMD.2003-007 Supply and Delivery of 44 Units of Brand New Transportation/Transmission Line Maintenance Vehicles for TransCo in Two (2) Schedules
2. The contract to be performed by the successful bidder shall consist of supplying and delivering the transmission line maintenance vehicles to TransCo-Head Office, Diliman, Quezon City, Metro Manila.
3. The Approved Budget for the Contract to be bid from the Internal Cash Generation are as follows:

   Schedule I – Four (4) Units Boom Truck and Ten (10) Units Light Duty Truck – P30,250,000.00

   Schedule II – Twenty (20) Units Pick-Up (4x4) & Ten (10) Units Pick-Up (4x2) – P28,750,000.00
4. Application for Eligibility is open to manufacturers, suppliers/dealers, distributors, firms who have the legal, technical and financial requisites of the contract bid.
5. Application for Eligibility shall be evaluated using "PASS/FAIL" criteria and only Eligible Bidders shall be invited by TRANSCO in the bidding. All bids equal to or lower than the Approved Budget for the Contract to be Bid shall be evaluated based on the responsiveness of the supplier's offer to the contract under bidding subject to Post qualification before an award is made. Bid Prices submitted higher than the Approved Budget for the Contract to be Bid shall be rejected and returned outright.
6. Eligibility & Bid Documents will be available for issuance on **December 12, 2003** at the **Bids and Contract Management Department**, Ground Floor, Power Center, BIR Road corner Quezon Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City 1104, Telefax No.: 921-23-08 upon presentation of Letter of Intent and a payment of non-refundable fee of P5,000.00 per schedule per copy.
7. Deadline for submission of duly accomplished Application for Eligibility Forms, statements and Bid Proposals (Technical and Price) shall be on or before **January 15, 2004**, 1:30 p.m. and shall be submitted at the MMD Conference Room, Ground Floor, TransCo Main Building, Power Center, TransCo, Diliman, Quezon City, Metro Manila.

   If the date is a non-working day or declared non-working day, the deadline for submission shall be moved to the next working day immediately following said date. Late submission shall not be accepted. Pre-Bid Conference shall be held on **December 29, 2003** at the same venue.
8. Manufacturers, suppliers/dealers, distributors, firms not yet included in the TransCo's List of registered Suppliers/Contractors, who wishes to participate in the public bidding, in order to facilitate eligibility check/screening, are requested to register with the registration office mentioned above by submitting the following basic requirements, duly notarized, which should be maintained current and updated at least once a year. A certificate of Registration will be issued to suppliers/contractors upon approval.
   - Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) business name registration or Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) registration certificate, as appropriate;
   - Mayor's permit and/or municipal license for the current year;
   - Taxpayer's Identification Number;
   - Notarized statement of the prospective bidder that it is not "blacklisted" or barred from bidding by any government agency, office or corporation;
   - Audited financial statements, stamped "received" by the BIR or its duly accredited and authorized institutions, for the immediately preceding calendar year, showing, among others, the prospective bidder's total and current assets and liabilities inclusive of Income Tax Return and Receipt;

   For foreign bidders, the required documents applicable to entities doing business in the Philippines shall be substituted by the appropriate equivalent documents issued by foreign bidder's country, which documents shall be duly acknowledged and/or authenticated by the Philippine Consulate thereat.
9. TransCo reserves the right to reject any application for Eligibility or all bids without offering any reasons, waive and required formality therein, and to make an award to the bidder whose proposal is most advantageous to the government.
10. Additional information shall be furnished upon request. All communications should be addressed to the undersigned at the aforementioned address.

(Sgd.) WINIFREDO SM. PANGILINAN
Chairman
Bids and Awards Committee

(PDI - Dec. 18, 2003)

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Deadline for submission: 22 December 2003

Notice to the Public

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PDI Management

(PDI – Dec. 18, 26 & Jan. 2, 2003)

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Former Chairman & President,
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Former Undersecretary, Department of Tourism

Died in the grace of our Lord on
December 16, 2003 at the age of 75.

His beloved wife Dolores Martinez Araneta; his late wife Leticia Leido Araneta; children Joey (+), Marissa, Jimmy & Sonia, Cristy (+), Bobby & Vicky, Alex & Elaine, and Goyito; grandchildren Tina, Chuck, Seluch, CJ, Miggy & Felicia; brothers Eddie & Joe (+); sisters Nenuca & Ditas; and other in-laws, relatives, and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

Internment will be on Friday, December 19 at the Martinez Mausoleum,
Balayan Cemetery after the 9 am Mass at the Balayan Catholic Church.

A Memorial Service will be held on Monday, December 22, 9 am at the Mortuary Chapel of Sanctuario de San Antonio, Forbes Park, Makati.

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OSIAS DARAUG MAGBANUA, M.D.

of Dingle, Iloilo

Joined our Creator last December 15, 2003 at the age of 76.

His children Rose Magbanua, Jun & Nila Magbanua, Grace & Ben Villarba; grandchildren Precious, June Alinne, Jinno, Jose Jason; and relatives request the reader to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at St. Joseph Mortuary, Jaro Cathedral Compound, Jaro, Iloilo City. Interment will be on Monday, December 22, 2003 at Iloilo Memorial Park, 2:00 p.m.

ROSARIO MONA PERALTA

Died on December 16, 2003
at the age of 86.

Her body lies in state at Chapel 2, Loyola Memorial Park Marikina.

From children Ligaya, Ronald, Lorna, Reggie and Leila.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16

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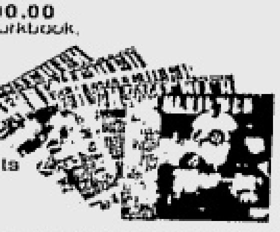

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INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Land Bank of the Philippines invites interested suppliers to apply for eligibility and to bid for the following items:

ITB No.	Item/Description	Approved Budget	Source of Funds
2003-288	5,120 bxs continuous forms	P 2,658,114.00	LBP Funds
2003-305	1 lot supply and delivery of CISCO ROUTERS (12 units CISCO 1750; 3 units CISCO 3725)	6,184,200.00	LBP Funds
2003-311	one (1) year lease rental of 35 units heavy duty copiers with collator	2,268,000.00	LBP Funds
2003-312	1 lot design, supply, delivery & installation/ commissioning of FM-200 fire detection & suppresion system	3,000,000.00	LBP Funds
2003-313	150 pcs IBM PCI multiprotocol adapter card	4,050,000.00	LBP Funds
	80 pcs LTO tape cartridge	200,000.00	LBP Funds
	600 pcs 3490E cartridge, imation or equivalent	180,000.00	LBP Funds
2003-314	100 pcs secure currency cassettes (Universal IBM Part #75G6992)	2,250,000.00	LBP Funds
2003-317	6 units encoder machine	6,600,000.00	LBP Funds
2003-322	4 units electronic checks clearing system	4,400,000.00	LBP Funds

Eligible to participate in the bidding are (1) Duly licensed Filipino citizens/sole proprietorships; (2) 60% Filipino owned Partnerships/Corporations; (3) Two (2) or more suppliers forming into a joint ventures jointly and severally liable; (4) Cooperatives duly registered with the CDA; (5) Suppliers with largest single contract, similar to the items for bid, for the last 2 years, at least equal to 50% of the approved budget, and (6) Suppliers with Net Financial Contracting Capacity (NFCC) at least equal to the approved budget.

Bidding of the above requirements is scheduled on January 21, 2004 at 1:00 PM and the Bid documents may be obtained from the Procurement Division of the General Services Department, 25th Floor, LANDBANK Plaza, M.H. del Pilar Street corner Dr. Quintos Street, Malate, Manila.

* Interested suppliers are requested to attend the Pre-Bid Conference scheduled on January 9, 2004 at the 25th Floor, Conference Room, LBP Plaza, Malate, Manila.

All particular relative to the **Qualification/ Eligibility, Bid Bond, Performance Bond, Pre-Bid Conference, Bid Evaluation and Award of Contract** shall be governed by the provisions of **RA 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations.**

Only those bidders who comply with the Bank's requirements shall be eligible to participate in the bidding

LANDBANK reserves the right to reject any or all bids, to declare the bidding a failure or waive any defect or informality and to accept bids as may be considered most advantageous to the Bank.

ANTONIO T. HERNANDEZ
SVP, Corporate Services & Subsidiaries Sector
Chairman, Committee on Bids and Awards

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Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me.
All their days of my life and I will dwell in the House of the Lord
forever.....

Psalms 41:13

God has called Home our loving Nanay

Doña Antonia Reyes y Hernandez

April 20, 1909 - December 16, 2003

And has reunited with our caring Tatay
Aurelio "AP" Reyes

Her loving children and their spouses: **Cesar** (†) & **Chit Guizon**; **Relly** & **Lucy Gritz**; **Sonia** & **Ogie** (†) **Mateo**; **Tessie**, **Boy** (†) & **Baby Puyat**; **Tos** & **Dinggay Jacinto**; **Weng** & his special son, **Julius**; **Nenne** & **Archit Bartolome**.

Her brothers (†) and sisters (†); her grandchildren; great grandchildren; and great great grandchildren; her relatives and friends; and special friend of **Nanay**, **Libay**, join in prayer for her eternal repose in heaven.

Her remains lie in state at St. Alphonsus Mary de Liguori Chapel, Magallanes Village, Makati City. Interment will be on Sunday, 21st of December 2003 at Loyola Memorial Park, Marikina City after the 1 p.m. requiem mass at St. Alphonsus Church, Magallanes Village.

EULALIA CARAMAT-LUGOD

Of Sta. Fe, Nueva Vizcaya and Aduas, Cabanatuan City

Peacefully died in the Grace of our Lord
on December 15, 2003 at the age of 68.

Her loving husband **CIRILO R. LUGOD**; devoted children and children-in-law **EILEEN ANNA LIZA** & Patrick, **CYRIL SERGIO ROBERTO** & fiancee Mhe-Ann, **CIRILO ZOILO** & Ruby, **ETHEL ARLENE** & Arnold, **YASMIN RAQUEL**, **ERTHA AMMARILIS** & Robert, **CIRILO AMIEL** & Irene; grandchildren **Jep, Tricia, Cyril, Angela, Jam, Jay, Michelle, Mariella, Joseph, Eula, Ianna** and **Luis**; sister **Dominga** and brother **Joaquin, Jr.**; brothers and sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces and relatives request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her remains lie in state at their residence on 81 A. Valino Street, Aduas, Cabanatuan City.

Interment will be on Tuesday, December 23, 2003 at the Sagrada Familia Memorial Gardens, Vijandre District, Cabanatuan City after the 1:30 p.m. memorial service at the United Methodist Chapel, Cabanatuan City.

MARK JOSEPH ECHAVEZ LEWIS

(U.S. Navy)
April 26, 1978 – Dec. 01, 2003

His parents **Albert & Daylin**; brothers **Vincent & Philip**; sister **Abigail**; relatives and friends request readers to pray to God Almighty for the eternal rest and peace of his soul.

His body lies in state at Funeraria Paz (Sucat). Interment will be on Sunday, 21 December at the Manila Memorial Park (Sucat) after the 0900H Mass which will be held at the main chapel.

Ceferino "Mon" Tan

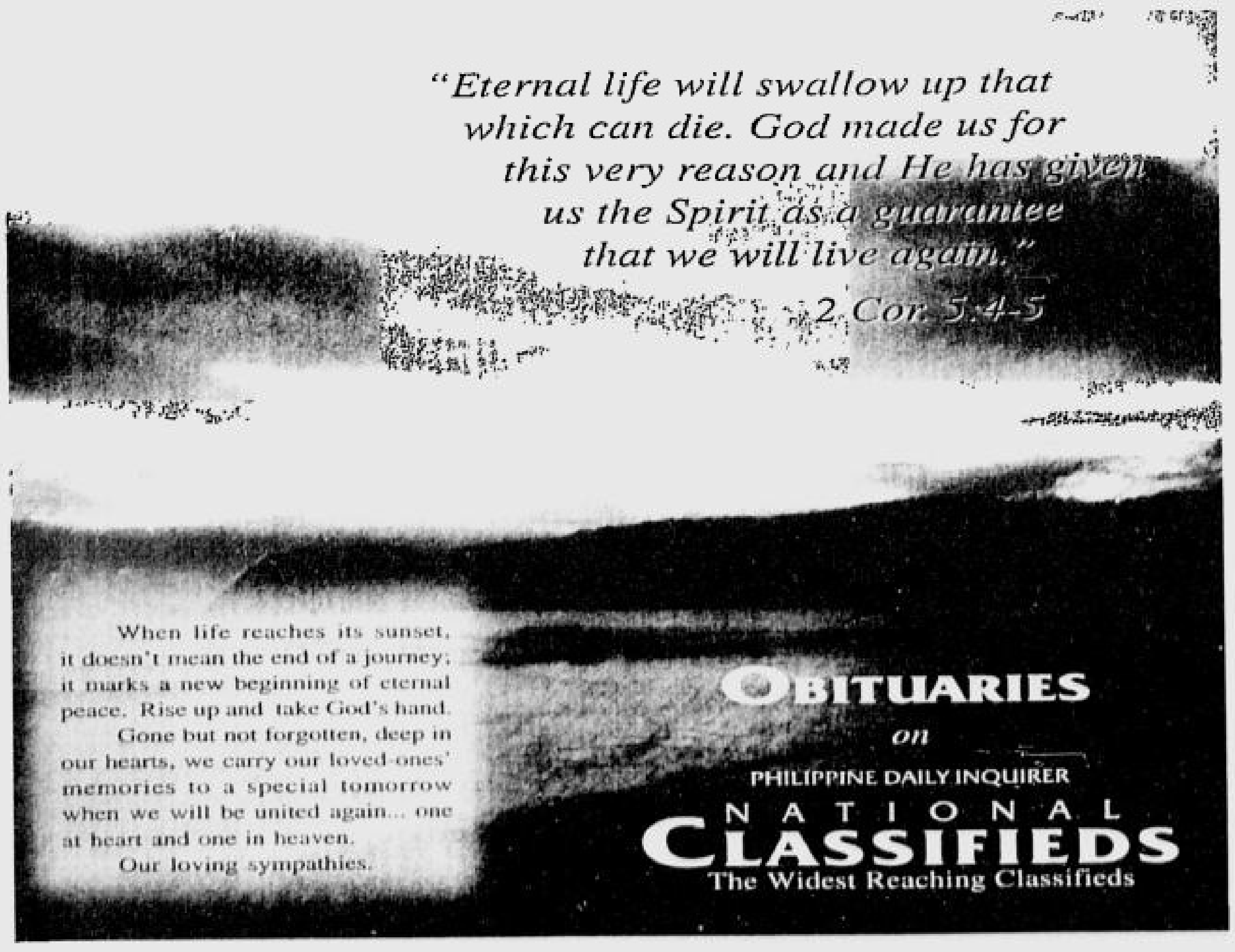
(Sta. Cruz, Marinduque)

Joined his Creator on December 16, 2003
at the age of 52.

His bereaved wife **Helen**; children and in-law **Joel, Jed & Joy, Ramonchito, Abigail**; his grandson **Gabby** and relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at La Funeraria Paz, Chapel C-12 Araneta Avenue, Quezon City.

Cremation will be on Sunday,
December 21, 2003, 9:00 a.m.
at the Chinese Cemetery.



"Eternal life will swallow up that which can die. God made us for this very reason and He has given us the Spirit as a guarantee that we will live again."
2 Cor. 5:4-5

When life reaches its sunset, it doesn't mean the end of a journey; it marks a new beginning of eternal peace. Rise up and take God's hand.

Gone but not forgotten, deep in our hearts, we carry our loved-ones' memories to a special tomorrow when we will be united again... one at heart and one in heaven.

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BUSINESS

MWSS elevates case vs Maynilad to SC

By Christine A. Gaylican

METROPOLITAN Waterworks and Sewerage System has elevated its case against Maynilad Water Services Inc. to the Supreme Court in an effort to finally be allowed to draw from the $120-million performance bond posted by the Lopez-controlled company.

MWSS Administrator Orlando Hondrade said in an interview yesterday that the agency needed to tap the bond so it could pay the debts acquired by the agency from the Lopez-owned company.

Government lawyers led by Justice Undersecretary Manuel Teehankee has filed a petition to the high tribunal to reverse the stay order imposed by the Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 90, which prohibited MWSS and its creditors from drawing from the performance bond.

Hondrade said the Supreme Court had accepted MWSS' motion and had ordered the two parties to file their position papers by Jan. 9.

The stay order issued by the regional trial court also prevented Maynilad's local and foreign creditors from seeking payment from the Lopez-owned company.

Under a corporate rehabilitation plan, Maynilad plans to pay its private creditors in nine years, with a two-year grace period on the principal. It said interest rates should be pegged on treasury bills for local banks and Libor (London Interbank Overnight Rates) for foreign creditors.

Among Maynilad's debts are a $25.5-million loan from Credit Agricole Indosuez Merchant Bank Asia Ltd., a $100-million bridge loan from a syndicate of foreign banks composed of Credit Agricole, Citibank NA, Barclays Bank PLC and BNP Paribas and a P1.88-billion in short-term peso loans from Equitable PCI-Bank, Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., East-West Bank and the Development Bank of the Philippines.

Maynilad stated that as of Oct. 31, it had P17.59 billion in liabilities as against P16.94 billion in assets.

SBMA opens bids for $215-M port project

By Michelle V. Remo

THE SUBIC Bay Metropolitan Authority will open today the envelopes containing the financial bids of the two remaining Japanese firms vying for the contract for the construction of Subic Bay Port, SBMA Chair Felicito Payumo has announced.

The bidders are port developer Toyo Corp. and the Shimitsu-Penta Ocean-Toa consortium.

Payumo said Subic Bay Port in Subic Bay Freeport Zone formed part of the long-term development plan of the SBMA and the Bases Conversion Development Authority for the entire Central Luzon.

Payumo said the establishment of the seaport was seen to further boost economic activity in Subic with the expected entry of more foreign investors.

The SBMA earlier conducted the evaluation of the technical bids of the original three Japanese firms that submitted bids. One bidder was, however, disqualified after its technical proposal was rejected by the SBMA.

Payumo said the SBMA would evaluate the financial bids of the two remaining Japanese firms in 45 days, after which the winning bidder would be named.

The $215-million port project, which will be financed by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, will also include facilities for water supply, fire fighting, storm water drainage, sewage system, telecommunications and yard lighting.

Payumo said the start of the bidding process was an indication the seaport project would push through despite opposition from the camp of Tourism Secretary and former SBMA Chair Richard Gordon.

Gordon and his camp have staunchly opposed the Subic Bay Port Development Project, saying it might cause the abolition in the future of the existing Subic airport. The Subic airport, which was established during Gordon's term as SBMA chair, is situated beside the point where the seaport will be established.

Gordon also said the establishment of the seaport in its proposed location at Cubi Point would pose environmental threats to the surrounding area.

Payumo, however, shrugged off the opposition from the Gordon camp, saying it has no bearing on the project since it has already obtained the approval by the Cabinet-level Investment Coordination Committee of the National Economic and Development Authority.

He added that the project had already been issued a sovereign guarantee, and had passed a feasibility study conducted by technical experts from JBIC.

Payumo added that the environmental compliance certificate, which will answer address environmental issues raised, was expected to be issued in January by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Pre-need firms given 5 years to cover trust fund shortfall

By Elena R. Torrijos

THE SECURITIES and Exchange Commission has decided to give pre-need companies, on a case-to-case basis, up to five years to cover for their trust fund deficiencies.

The SEC finds this option more acceptable than an industry proposal to be allowed to use a higher interest rate figure to window-dress financial statements.

"Instead of giving a higher return on investment, we will allow them to amortize over five years their (trust fund) deficiency," SEC Chair Lilia Bautista told reporters yesterday.

Any additional deficiency after the first year, however, would have to be covered immediately.

SEC general accountant Roberto Manabat said that only certain pre-need companies that could justify the amortization would be allowed to avail themselves of the reprieve.

In the meantime, the commission has approved the industry group's request for the SEC to also allow a five-year amortization of insurance premium reserves.

In a letter to Bautista earlier, the Philippine Federation of Pre-need Plan Companies Inc. recommended that an interest rate assumption of 12 percent per annum be used for the next three years for the computation of the companies' actuarial reserve liabilities.

The ARL determines the level of trust fund a pre-need company must maintain to ensure that the benefits of plan holders can be met. At present, pre-need companies are required to use a 10-percent interest rate assumption. Allowing a higher rate of 12 percent, therefore, would give pre-need companies leeway to contribute less for trust fund build-up.

Banco de Oro sees double-digit growth in 2004

BANCO de Oro Universal Bank, largely owned by retail magnate Henry Sy, sees double-digit profit growth next year from the planned expansion of its branch network and loan portfolio.

In an interview yesterday, BDO president Nestor Tan also said the bank was also expecting to post significant growth in transaction banking, which covers cash management products and electronic banking services.

Tan said the bank would end this year with over P1.4 billion in profit on the back of robust net interest income and trading gains. The bank had targeted to end the year with P1.35 billion.

The bank, the ninth largest in the country, plans to open next year seven additional branches to bring its total network nationwide to 185 branches. Earlier, BDO acquired 60 branches of First e-Bank.

BDO's strategy will be focused on building a much stronger consumer banking business, which currently accounts for less than 5 percent of the bank's total loan portfolio, and on further strengthening of its niche in the middle market. The bank also aims to build its treasury, trust and investment banking businesses, boost transaction banking and improve its bancassurance operations.

Banco de Oro, which has leveraged on its affiliation with the SM group, has been aggressive in acquiring banks or bank branches and raising funding for the expansion of its lending portfolio.

Elena R. Torrijos

National Power Corporation

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID
NPC-MMSD 2003-010

The Bids and Awards Committee (BAC)-MMSD of NPC invites interested bidders to apply for eligibility and to bid for the following requirements.

Schedule	Date/Time & Place of Bidding	Item Description	PR No./Inquiry No.	ABC
	Jan. 20, 2004 10:00 AM Kañao Rm	Mechanical Parts for Pulang Lupa DPP "CKD"	PB031203-MMVB9794 (PB2) HO-PUL-03-0082 HO-MAB-03-0019 SL-PDP-03-0023 HO-AUR-03-0020	16,754,620.00
II		Mechanical Parts for Romblon Diesel Power Plant "CKD"	SL-RDP-03-0032 SH030910-MMAD9451(PB)	3,882,838.00
III		Mechanical Parts for Dinagat DPP "CKD"	HO-DIN-03-0129/0130 PB040120-MMJP0179	1,326,908.00
IV	Jan 20, 2004 2:00 PM Kañao Rm	Hauling of diesel fuel from designated origin to different NPC-SPUG plants for Luzon Operations	HO-LOD-03-0039 PB040120-MMMT0178	16,262,160.00

NOTE: A Pre-bidding Conference will be held for the following bidding schedules:

Schedule	Date	Time	Place
Schedule I, II, & III	January 6, 2004	2:00 PM	Kañao Function Room
Schedule IV	January 6, 2004	3:00 PM	Kañao Function Room

Complete sets of Application form for Eligibility and Bid Documents may be obtained from the Materials Management Services Division, Materials Management Dept., of NPC, Diliman, Quezon City with Tel No. 9245357/9245477 upon payment of non-refundable fee of PHP100.00 per schedule starting on December 11, 2003. No bid documents will be issued 3 days before the date of bidding.

Bids will be received at the assigned Bidding Room, MMSD, MMD, NPC, Diliman, Quezon City on the date and time specified above after which Eligibility Requirements and Bid Proposals will be opened in the presence of attending bidders. Certificate of Registration/Accreditation issued by Former Genco Offices and PSD will be honored provided that the Certification is still valid.

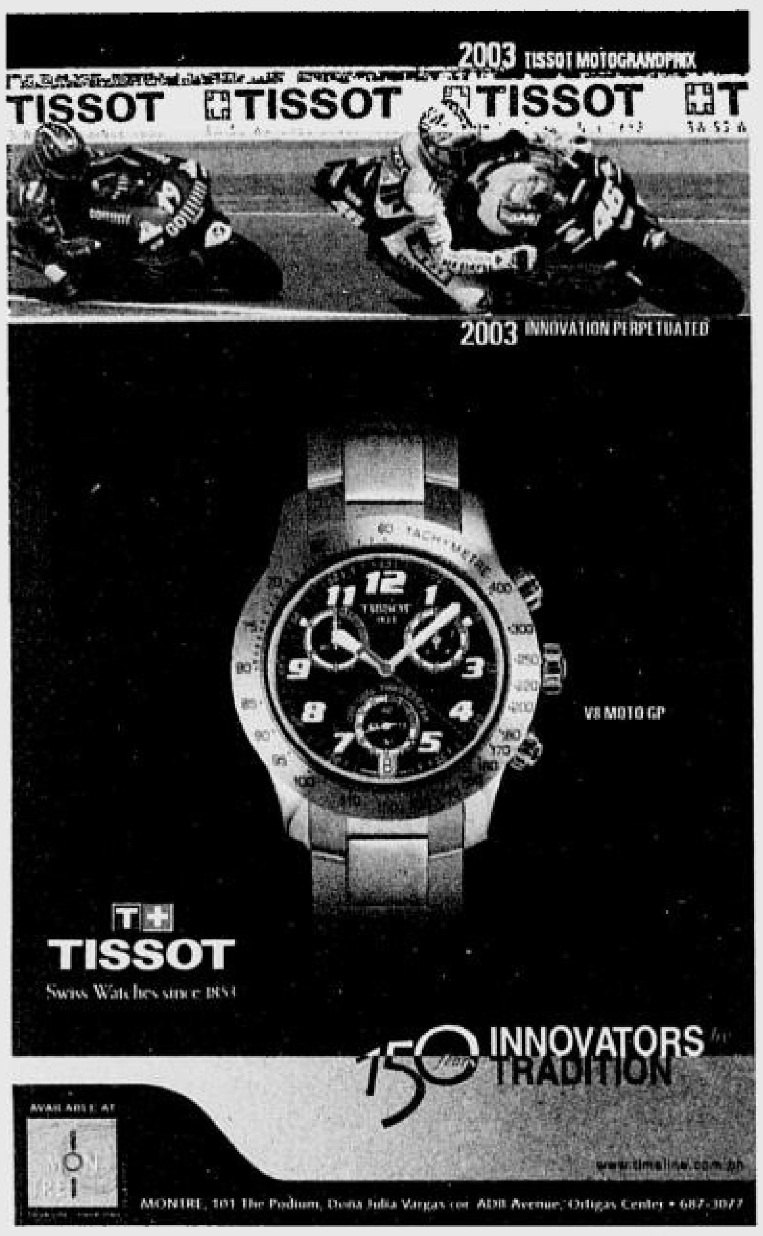
Prospective Bidders shall signify conformance to bidding terms and conditions as required and shall ensure the same through proper submission/execution in accordance with the IRR of Republic Act No. 9184.

The Bidder shall furnish as part of his/her bid, a bid security in the amount equivalent to a percentage of the approved budget for the contract to be bid in the form of Cash, Manager's/Cashier's Check, Irrevocable Letter of Credit - One percent (1%), Bank Guarantee - One and a half percent (1.5%), Surety Bond - Two and a half percent (2.5%), penal and callable on demand issued by a Surety or Insurance Company accredited by the Office of the Insurance Commission.

NPC reserves the right to reject any or all bids at any time prior to award of contract, waive any defects therein, and accept the offer most advantageous to the Corporation, without thereby incurring any of the following: a) liability whatsoever to offset expenses or losses the bidder may incur in the preparation of the bids and b) obligation to inform the affected bidder or bidders of the grounds for the basis of the BAC's action.

(Sgd.) LORENZO S. MARCELO
Chairman, Bids and Awards Committee
MMSD-NPC

(PDI - Dec 11 & 18, 2003)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MOTORING

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Editor Cesar D. Mangawang

Be merry and still drive safe this holiday season

ILLUSTRATION: STEPH BRAVO

The decision to drink or not to drink at all should be made before the merriment starts

By Tessa R. Salazar

THE CHRISTMAS season, undoubtedly, is the busiest time of the year for Filipinos. Even just basing this observation from the number of vehicles that passes through the expressways and skyways—from the estimated 2,000 vehicles on an ordinary day to 300,000 daily during the Yuletide season—the city's hustle and bustle level rises so many notches higher.

The incredible volume of vehicles that squeezes its way through the expressways—which were originally designed to accommodate only up to 75,000 vehicles a day—increases the likelihood of many drivers to lose concentration behind the wheel.

Drowsy driving

Among the results of being submerged in prolonged traffic gridlocks is drowsiness.

Anything that lessens a driver's control is considered impaired driving, one type of which is drowsy driving. Many factors are at play.

Drowsy drivers could have taken medicines or drugs, they could have been fatigued from all those holiday parties, or they could be drunk. The traffic is the trigger, while the various factors fuel the effect.

Drowsiness while driving should not to be taken lightly, especially for those driving public utility buses or trucks, according to the Land Transportation Office's traffic safety chief Daisy Jacobo. A drowsy driver, who is carrying tons of deadly metal on the road, has the potential to kill many lives.

She adds that public utility drivers also need the support of their operators in terms of ensuring the proper trip procedures during the holiday season.

The temptation to forego pretrip inspections in favor of more actual trips for more profits is greater at this time, but Jacobo stresses this is also the season bus operators should be most vigilant of travel conditions. Bus inspectors, she adds, must also be vigilant of the loading capacities of their vehicles and the fitness of their drivers.

Jacobo also cautions private motorists that one of the most common holiday motoring accidents involves cars ramming the rear underside of trucks. Jacobo observes most drivers involved in such accidents attribute them to lost brakes. But most of the time, she counters, the cause is overloading, or overtaxing the vehicle.

Personal choice

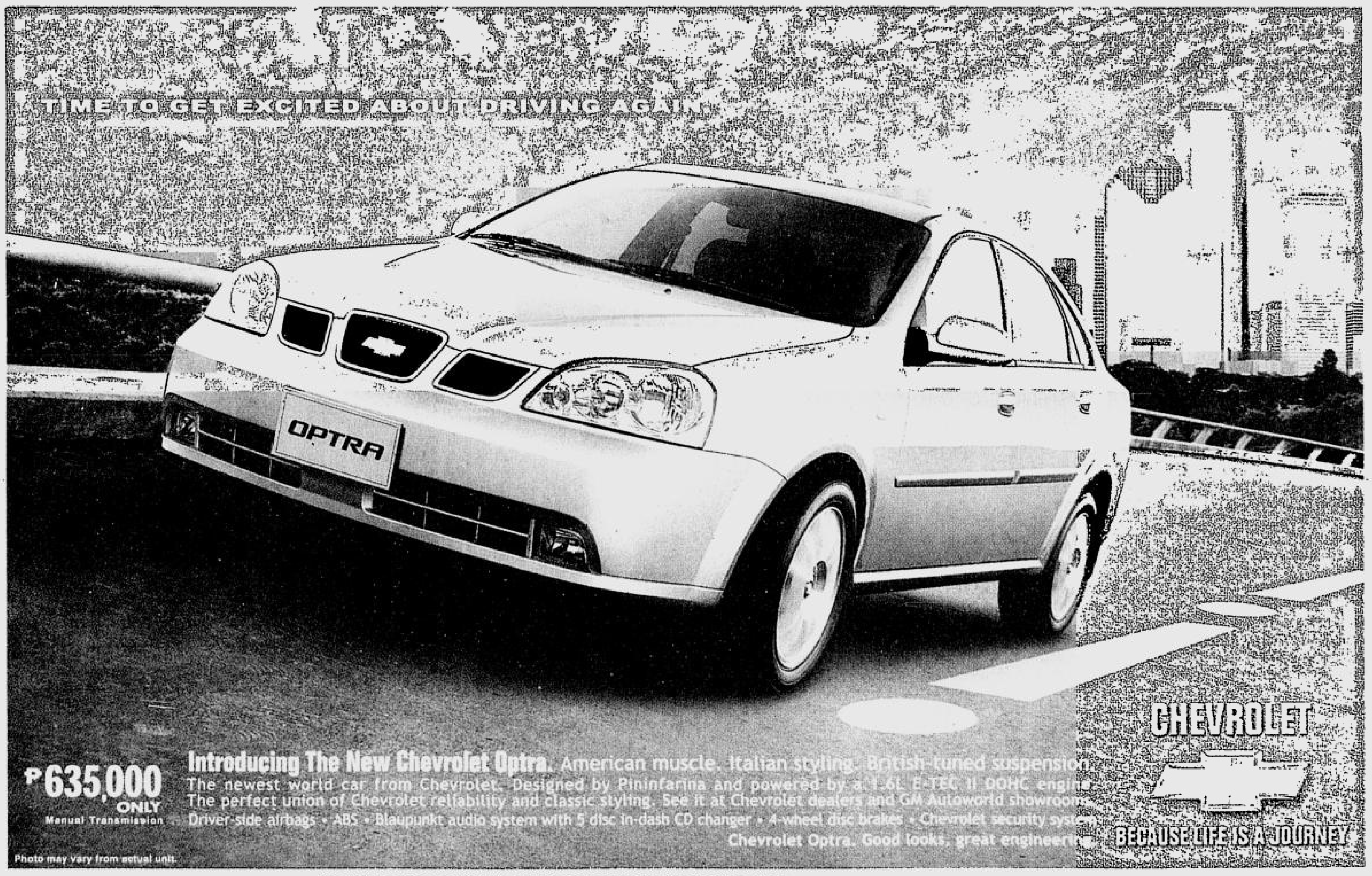
Christmas merry-making involves varying degrees of alcoholic drinking. Jacobo stresses, however, that drinking is a personal choice and not a social obligation. Entrusting your life and limb to a drunk driver is also a personal choice—and probably a stupid one.

Jacobo advises the decision to drink or not to drink at all should be made before the merriment starts, and the person who decides to be the "sacrificial lamb" or designated driver should be responsible enough to know where his or her alcoholic limit lies.

According to Jacobo, the freewheeling Christmas season induces some motorists to be carefree and freewheeling as well, making them forget to wear their seatbelts or observe proper roadside courtesies. That, says Jacobo, can be fatal.

What to do when you're drowsy? Stop and take a nap, says Jacobo. Get to a gas station and take a 30-minute shuteye. If your friend, who has had too much to drink, insists on driving himself home, convince him or her to stay and sleep over at the place.

Not doing so is throwing caution to the winds, and it may have tragic results. In the National Capital Region alone, hit-and-run accidents from January to December 2002 totaled 260, up from 171 the previous year. No wonder Santa rides his sleigh up in the clouds, above the maddening Metro Manila Christmas street scene.



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Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 3205 Series of 2003

THE GRAND Vitara XL-7 lives up to its name as an extra-large, family-size variant of Suzuki SUVs.

Vitara's bigger, brawnier brother

By Charles E. Buban

FOR THOSE who don't want to drive lumbering giant SUVs, the latest Grand Vitara from Suzuki can be an appealing option.

We're referring to the Japanese automaker's flagship model, the Grand Vitara XL-7.

The family size XL-7 is a roomier and longer version of its compact brethren (having a wheelbase 32 centimeters more).

With a stretched wheelbase, the XL-7 has more cargo area and enough space for a third row of jump seats that provides riding comfort and enough legroom for seven.

Latest addition

"The XL-7 is the latest addition to the country's competitive SUV market and promises our buyers a fair deal against the rest of its competitors out there," said Kiyoshi Kawahara, president of Suzuki Philippines Inc.

Open the hood and find one of the cleanest engine presentations in any SUV to date. It's all neatly plumbed, with a stout brace linking the strut towers.

Within this assembly lies a 2.7-liter V6, 24-valve DOHC engine, the largest powerplant Suzuki has to fit in its SUV lineup.

This affords the XL-7 its 180 horsepower, 250 Nm of torque (as against its compact brethren's 140 horses and 193 Nm torque) and 1,850 kg of towing capacity.

"To match this power, Suzuki mated the engine with an electronically controlled 5-speed automatic transmission and a Drive Select 4x4 system that allows the driver to shift 'on-the-fly' (at speed) from two-wheel drive to four-wheel drive," revealed Kawahara.

Safety and security

Safety features in the XL-7 include a sturdy and fully boxed ladder frame with built-in crumple zone at the front and rear, reinforced side-impact beams and steel-reinforced passenger compartment.

As standard it has second-generation dual front airbags, height-adjustable seatbelt anchorage, keyless remote entry, rear-door child safety locks and child seat latch system.

The XL-7 also features a four-wheel ABS brakes with an electronic brake force distribution for powerful and effective stopping power.

First introduced in 2001

First introduced in 2001, the latest XL-7 variant has been updated every year. The recent version comes with a dash and console with wood grain trim, chrome accents, halogen headlights and colored bumpers.

Other notable interior features are an air-conditioning system equipped with a micron air filtration system that screens out allergy-causing dusts and pollens.

"The XL-7 is, perhaps, the only vehicle in its class to offer a rear air-conditioning system that lets second and third row passengers adjust the direction and amount of cool air blown," said Paula Popple, Suzuki Philippines advertising and promotions manager.

Exterior features

The XL-7 is large enough to be considered handsome in a truck-like way (as opposed to cutesy) and like the Grand Vitara, the XL-7 has a chubby face that never fails to attract.

To give one a measure of the XL-7's dimensions, this Suzuki SUV is 54.5 cm longer than the regular Grand Vitara, 45.7 cm longer than the (Toyota) RAV4, 15.2 cm longer than the (Honda) CR-V and is only 8.4 cm shorter than the Isuzu Trooper.

Priced at P1.398 million, the XL-7 went on sale last month at all Suzuki dealerships.

"The XL-7 is indeed a combination of impressive features that provide an affordable, sensibly-sized, easy to park and maneuver alternative to many much bulkier competitors out there," said Poppler.

Improving the compatibility of cars and trucks

ON THE ROAD

Aida Sevilla-Mendoza

IF YOU THINK that "compatibility" is a term confined to marriages and computers, you obviously haven't heard of compatibility in the automobile industry. In the United States, where sales of light trucks (sport utility vehicles, pickups and minivans) have grown to more than half of all new passenger vehicle sales, compatibility became a hot topic this year when the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) threatened to impose stricter regulations on light trucks unless manufacturers voluntarily undertook design and equipment changes to reduce the deaths and injuries caused by these vehicles when they collide with passenger cars.

At issue is the crash compatibility of an SUV and a passenger car in which the car's occupants are in greater danger. For years, many automakers disputed the contentions of critics and consumer groups that SUVs and pickup trucks, because of their size and weight, clobber and damage other cars that have an equal right to be on the road.

Less dangerous

The good news is that 15 auto manufacturers from four countries doing business in the US, with the exception of Porsche (manufacturer of the Cayenne SUV), recently agreed to improve the compatibility of different vehicles by reconfiguring their SUVs and pickups to make them less dangerous to people riding in cars. The industry's initiative should ultimately result in the safe coexistence of large and small vehicles on the road.

Foremost among the voluntary standards is to make the front-end, energy-absorbing structures of SUVs and pickups overlap at least half of the bumper zones of cars to reduce the likelihood that the bigger, taller vehicles would skip over the front bumpers of cars in head-on collisions. To accomplish this, the manufacturers can lower the rail frames of their light trucks or install steel bars known as blocker beams underneath the trucks so that the beams line up with the bottom of car bumpers.

Another safety measure would require automakers to make side airbags standard equipment on all new vehicles, cars as well as light trucks, by 2009 to protect passengers' heads and chests in side-impact collisions. First introduced as an option in the late 1990s, side airbags that protect the torso and head have been found to reduce by half the risk of dying in side-impact collisions, a driver fatality study made by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety showed last August.

Side impact

The results of the study suggest that side airbags could be as important to safety as seatbelts although the two perform different functions and are not mutually exclusive. Side-impact collisions cause more concern among car occupants than frontal ones because unlike the latter, in a side collision there is little room to absorb the crash energy of an SUV or pickup. Yet the institute observed that among 2004 model vehicles in the US, only 47 percent offered side airbags as standard or optional equipment and some were the kind that protects only the chest.

A week ago, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers signed and released a letter projecting that the design and equipment changes to be phased in between 2007 and 2009 at a cost of about US$300 per vehicle will probably save thousands of lives annually. The insurance institute says the changes could reduce the risk of death by 28 percent for car occupants in head-on collisions with SUVs or pickups.

Light trucks that weigh a maximum of 4,536 kilograms (10,000 lbs) will undergo the design changes, including many that are currently outside the regulatory system such as the Toyota Sequoia and the Hummer H2, but not the Hummer H1.

Performance tests

The group set a timetable for exploring further design changes and agreed to performance tests that most vehicles cannot pass unless they are equipped with torso and head side airbags. By 2007, half of all new vehicles will be required to undergo the tests and all by 2009.

Meanwhile, it was noted that some of the largest SUVs and pickups already comply with the industry's design change requirements: the Ford Excursion, Ford Explorer, Lincoln Navigator, Dodge Durango, Honda Pilot, Nissan Xterra and Toyota 4Runner. Some models of the Hummer H2, Nissan Pathfinder Armada, Chevrolet Suburban, Nissan Titan, Dodge Ram and GMC Sierra also meet the new voluntary standards. But the Toyota Tundra, Toyota Sequoia, Jeep Cherokee, Mercedes-Benz G-Class, Cadillac Escalade and GMC Envoy do not comply as yet. *(With New York Times reports)*

* * *

TODAY'S BUMPER STICKER: Atheism is a nonprophet organization.

* * *

(E-mail comments to asevilla@inquirer.com.ph.)

Party time

FULL TANK

Al Mendoza

IT IS the season of parties again. I missed the Isuzu party and lost my chance to win the laptop raffled off that evening. *Sayang.* But more *sayang* was dzRH's Deo Macalma, who attended the party but had already left when his name was picked from the *tambiolo. Sori na lang,* Deo.

I didn't miss the Honda party but I won nothing in the raffle. *Lalong sayang.* But nevertheless, I enjoyed the Honda party at Merk's Place in Greenbelt 3.

Not that I was allowed to sing some Beatles songs, with The Bedroom Boys doing a superb backup, but the warm reception from Arnel's Angels like Dansel The Preggie and Tin Tin Reyes was something to cherish about once more. Butch Gamboa doing an Elvis Presley song, complete with his pelvic twist, and Vernon Sarne belting his favorite "Because" by the DC Five were a sight to behold.

Of course I enjoyed the singing immensely myself on stage, what with Richard Merk no less as one of my chu-chu-wa boys when I did "You Can't Do That," "Money," "No Reply," "Boys" and several others. Richard, whose mother Anna Brazil is still the undisputed Billie Holiday of the Philippines, was just as surprised as Honda's Arnel Doria at the way I did my act. Up till morning, Richard was texting me furiously, telling me I can really hack it and should give Ramon Jacinto a run for his money if I decide to switch jobs next year. Ha-ha! The last time I did Beatles songs on stage was almost a year ago, with The Rockin' Revival as my backup band at Rockwell's Dish, and Toyota's Danny Isla and Manila Times' Vernon Sarne joining me in doing "This Boy," "In My Life" and "Baby's In Black." A hit act by the trio, chorused Erle Sebastian of Today and Ariel de Jesus of TMP.

After the show, Philip Cu-Unjieng, the owner of Dish, tried to lure me into having a once-a-week performance at his extremely popular joint. Ha-ha! I said make me an offer. Up till now, I have yet to receive one. Philip was drunk that night? Or was it me having an illusion and had "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds" swimming in my mind?

Anyway, Letty Jimenez-Magsanoc missed my performance at Dish by just a few minutes and I'm not sure now if she was celebrating, or ruing missing the occasion, when I joined her table to kill a bottle of red wine.

Danny Isla might yet come up with another blockbuster of a Toyota party this year and this early, I'm giving you the warning don't come in late or you'll miss my first set.

The second set might not include "I Saw Her Standing There," "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "Happiness Is A Warm Gun."

Like Paul McCartney, if not John Lennon, I don't entertain requests.

* * *

There's a new kid in town.

Marianne Ortiz of Kia says Kia's new babe, the SUV Sorento, is now in the Philippines after making big waves in America and Europe.

In a statement, Marianne says Sorento "was named after a serene town in Italy."

Marianne adds: "The Sorento boasts of stylish look, abundant space, sturdy body-on-frame design and a strong engine performance. It is Euro III compliant which is way above the standard requirement for an SUV in its class, making it at once environment-friendly."

The Sorento is a 3.5-liter gasoline with a V6 24-valve double overhead cam. It serves up 197cps of thrust@5,500 rpm and a generous 30.1kg.m@3,000 rpm of maximum torque. Its part-time 4WD system offers switch-selectable shifting between 2WD and 4WD modes for all-weather driving. Equipped with the standard ABS (automatic brake system), it has leather seats, free-running differential and a CD audio system with eight speakers.

The Kia Sorento, rated 5-star by the National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration (US Department of Transportation), has a three-year warranty (110,000 km).

The price? Call Marianne at 817-8228 or 892-0367.

* * *

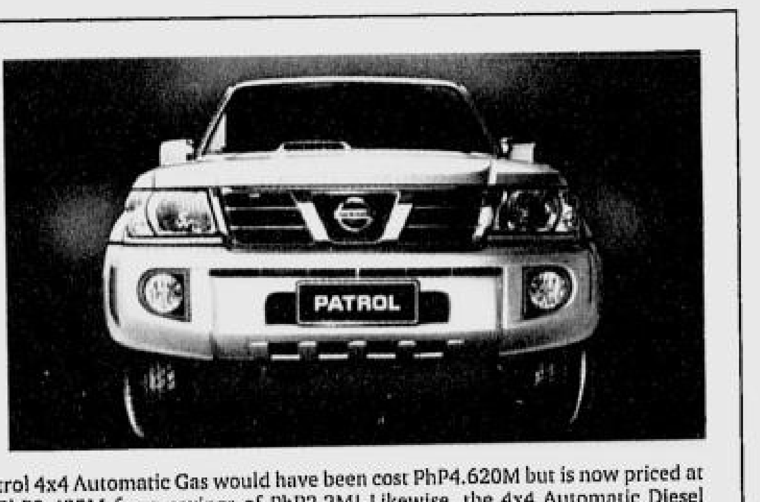
I suggest that parking lots inside malls like Rockwell, Greenbelt and SM provide baskets for their booth attendants that they can use when receiving payments from and issuing loose change to motorists. That way, we can avoid the spilling of coins or parking lot cards when in the course of yielding the plastic cards for fee computations. Saves time and eliminates irritation among parking lot users—if not accidents.

The idea is original but I'm not collecting any copyright fees—except when Gerry Zorilla goads me to have a drink with him at Rockwell's Via Mare Oyster Bar, which I will not refuse. Very irresistible—the oysters that is, which are direct from Roxas City.

Just say when, Gerry Boy. And tag JP Masakayan along, please? I don't want us getting grilled in the rumor mill as the new love team of the year. JP should be our balancer—as in the wonder metal chip of the engineering marvel that is the Segway.

* * *

QUOTE ME. If you can help it, stop buying gifts now and avoid getting caught in traffic snarls. Do it after Dec. 25.



4-WHEEL DRIVING WITH THE NEW NISSAN PATROL

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Universal Motors Corporation, the authorized assembler and distributor of Nissan light commercial and recreational vehicles, proudly re-introduces the leader of the of the "power" SUV pack --- the new Nissan Patrol 4x4.

The Patrol has long been the vehicle of choice of the privileged few, from government dignitaries to name-droppable tycoons to celebrities, and this remains true until today. In fact, it has evolved into a status symbol of the discreet tasteful kind. The Patrol is ideally connected with the high degree of authority, influence and respect and progressive lifestyle enjoyed by the leaders in society --- now, more than ever!

Four-Wheel Drive (4WD)

This much sought-after SUV outdoes itself once more by adding on the part-time four-wheel drive feature with automatic locking hubs which permits hassle-free shifting from 2-wheel drive to 4-wheel drive as the driver sees fit.

The Patrol's four-wheel drive capacity provides the option of greater traction and handling especially during rough and challenging driving conditions such as slippery roads or muddy, sandy road surfaces. Otherwise, the 2WD high range is commonly used for normal driving conditions or on dry hard surfaces to prevent unnecessary wear and tear on tires.

The 4WD high range is engaged only when maneuvering with the 2-wheel drive becomes noticeably difficult. This applies to slippery road conditions or sandy or muddy surfaces. While the 4-wheel drive low range supplies the best traction and torque for uphill or downhill driving or for hard driving in sand and mud.

Pure Power

The Nissan Patrol 4x4 is powered by its award winning ZD30 Neo DI Turbo Diesel Engine that uses the M-Fire combustion technology for optimum fuel efficiency. This highly-celebrated diesel engine produces less exhaust emission and engine noise. Gasoline variants of the Patrol is also outfitted with the 4.5L TB45E Engine with Electronic Concentrated Engine Control System (ECCs) that is designed for a highly precise electronic fuel injection.

Benchmark Amenities

This intimidating beauty is also equipped with benchmark luxury features and performance and safety enhancements such as power signal mirrors with red light indicators, a keyless remote entry alarm complete with the Nissan Anti-theft System (NATS), piercing new multi-reflector headlights and tail lights and intense combi lamps.

More Affordable

The new Nissan Patrol 4x4 is now made more affordable under the new value-based excise tax system. Previously, 4x4 Sport Utility Vehicles were taxed at 50% - 100% depending on the vehicle's engine displacement. The Patrol 4x4 Automatic Gas would have been cost PhP4.620M but is now priced at PhP2.425M for a savings of PhP2.2M! Likewise, the 4x4 Automatic Diesel would have been priced PhP3.33M but is now made more affordable at PhP2.335M or a savings of PhP995,000.00! The Manual Diesel variant would also have retailed at PhP3.180M but is now sold at the PhP2.240M with a savings of PhP940,000.00!

Now, with the current value based excise tax system, the new Nissan Patrol 4x4 is now priced well within the range of its target clientele.

Four-wheel drive assuredly delivers a difference in any vehicle's performance. In the new Nissan Patrol 4x4's case, it certainly brings forth greater power and leverage in any situation. Not to mention, better value for money.

Great Deals

Take advantage of the other great deals from UMC --- 0% interest, low monthly and low downpayment financing schemes are available for selected models of the Nissan Frontier 4x2 and 4x4, Titanium, Patrol 4x2 and Urvan Escapade exclusively through BPI Family Bank. This very limited offer runs until December 16, 2003.

Hurry over to the nearest authorized Nissan dealer now and get more value for your money!

ADVT

Road safety everyone's duty

By Charles E. Buban

ROAD traffic injuries are a deadly scourge, taking the lives of millions of men, women and children while permanently disabling hundreds of thousands more around the world each year.

In 2000, the World Health Organization reported about 1.26 million individuals killed in road crashes in addition to 10 to 15 million who are injured every year in road traffic collisions.

In fact, the WHO projected that this ninth leading cause of all deaths worldwide will become the third leading cause of disability by 2020, surpassed only by heart disease and major depression.

The sad part is that the great majority of these cases will continue to occur in developing countries, among pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and users of public transport.

Crucial risk factors

"In these parts of the world like ours, we always take for granted the crucial risk factors involved like driving under the influence of alcohol, speeding, underutilization of safety devices such as seat belts, child restraints and helmets, poor road planning, unsafe vehicle design, poor implementation of road safety measures and poor emergency health services," said Alfredo Alarcon, president of Motorcycle Development Program Participants Association during the second road safety seminar held recently in Makati City.

The safety seminar organized by the Federation of Asian Motorcycle Industries (Fami) was conducted to increase safety awareness through responsible motorcycle riding while promoting road safety for everyone.

The Singapore-based Fami represents the motorcycle industries of India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines.

Here in the Philippines, Fami's active member is the MDPPA, composed of six manufacturers—Honda, Kawasaki, Kymco, Loncin, Suzuki and Yamaha.

Often cited

"We are here—discussing road safety—because motorcycles are often cited as the culprit in most of these accident," laments Alarcon.

"The truth is road safety is not just the responsibility of a few individuals or motorcycle riders. It is not just a responsibility of the government or the motorcycle manufacturers. It is the responsibility of everyone," he exclaimed.

A Fami 1999-2003 data revealed that although motorcycles comprised 56 percent of the country's total vehicle population—including the 20 percent used as tricycles—this mode of transport has figured in just over 10 percent of the total vehicular accidents (which include buses, cars and trucks).

"With these facts, we can still consider motorcycle a safer mode of transport," said Alarcon.

About to change

But since January 2003, a total of 3,967 accidents have been recorded, making motorcycles the second most accident-prone—next to jeepneys—this year. This was revealed by MDPPA vice chair for marketing Ajer Kiocho.

This year more Filipinos switched to motorcycles because of their lower cost of acquisition, economy of operation, maneuverability and the sense of freedom they give.

Said Kiocho: "But the problem is they just bought without educating themselves on the proper way of handling the motorcycle. In most cases, the accident was due to driver's error."

Kiocho added that MDPPA also found out that most of the accidents happened in the first 90 days after acquiring the motorcycle.

"So it's not right to think motorcycles are becoming dangerous, what is alarming is why people rush in buying a motorcycle without bothering to educate themselves on proper riding ethics. That is what we are trying to address right now," he added.

Rider education

With the growing motorcycle population, the various motorcycle groups nationwide are proposing more riders' education, which is expected to stop the increasing number of road accidents.

James Mirasol of the Motorcycle Advocates of the Philippines has proposed that the government set aside 2 percent from the taxes paid by motorcycle manufacturers to fund education of riders, drivers and pedestrians.

"It should be trisectoral education approach covering the industry, the government and the motorcycle riding public," suggested Mirasol.

Alarcon also added that not only in education, the government should also look at strategies that will address rates of speed and alcohol consumption, promotion of helmets, and greater visibility of people walking and cycling, who are most often the victims in motorcycle mishaps.

"A concerted effort on the part of governments and their partners to improve road safety can make a world of difference," he said.

High-profile car enthusiasts go on 'a safari'

By Tessa R. Salazar

THE LITTER has grown. After lording over the field in Edsa, the CATS are on the prowl at The Fort in Makati, and they have company—fast company—from one of the most recognizable car brands in the world.

On Dec. 12, high-profile car enthusiasts went on "a safari" and viewed the magnificent CATS Motors Inc., the premier Mercedes-Benz authorized dealership, in its newest habitat at the Fort Bonifacio Global City.

Evolution

CATS, which originally meant Car Accessories, Tires and Services evolved and became CATS Motors Inc. in 1995 as an authorized Mercedes-Benz dealer.

In the year 2000, it was authorized by Commercial Motors Corp. to import CBUs directly from Stuttgart, Germany, which further prompted it to upgrade its Greenhills showroom and service facilities, to become a fully compliant Mercedes-Benz dealership.

It is now known as an importer of Mercedes-Benz offering not just the vehicles but the works—full-factory warranties, complete after-sales service, parts and accessories, a Mercedes-Benz boutique and even a body and paint shop. It boasts of a complete line of Mercedes-Benz.

Its sprawling new home at The Fort is patterned after the familiar showrooms in Europe. No wonder, this is the first dealership in Southeast Asia to build its structure according to the Mercedes-Benz "Autohaus" concept and patterned after the international corporate identity of MB in architecture and construction design, thus the towering pillars and more-than-the-usual spacious showroom.

The distinct look of the Mercedes-Benz tiles, paints, signage and the stringent design in lighting are all imported from Germany.

Celebration

The new dealership celebrated its opening with champagnes overflowing amid Mercedes-Benz enthusiasts roaming the high-ceilinged showroom freely.

There were plenty of "animals" to ogle at, nine of them to be exact.

The SL 55, a limited production 500-hp pace car for the F1 sans the speed limiter, could be seen in one corner. The Smart roadster flaunts itself on the other side. Any cat hungry for speed would have, indeed, given chase to covet the promise of pure unadulterated driving pleasure with this roadster.

The other sexy "beasts" in the showroom are the S350, the high-end luxury sedan that competes with a BMW 7. series; an E240, which is head to head with a 5 series; and a CLK 320, a competitor of the 3 series.

Just like cutouts

Some corners of the showroom are just like cutouts from the Frankfurt Motorshow. Five vintage cars, such as the first generation SL (Gullwing), represent one car for each era.

"Animal trainer" Felix Ang, president of CATS Motors Inc., said there was no other ideal "sanctuary" for his big cats but at the Fort Bonifacio Global City, which he dubbed the city of the future.

"We have decided to invest here, take advantage of the great business potential and modernity, and foremost, be at the heart of where our valued customers will find more convenience, prestige and comfort."

For easy access, the showroom, workshop, parts and accessories department have been integrated. Individual areas are even color-coded. A cozy customer lounge entices people to wait in luxury while their "pets" are being "treated" by expert "veterinarians." The entertainment center is a showroom in itself, with high-definition flat TV and free-flowing coffee from the Bistro.

Drop by CATS Motors at The Fort, 32nd Avenue corner Rizal Drive, Taguig. No need to bring binoculars.

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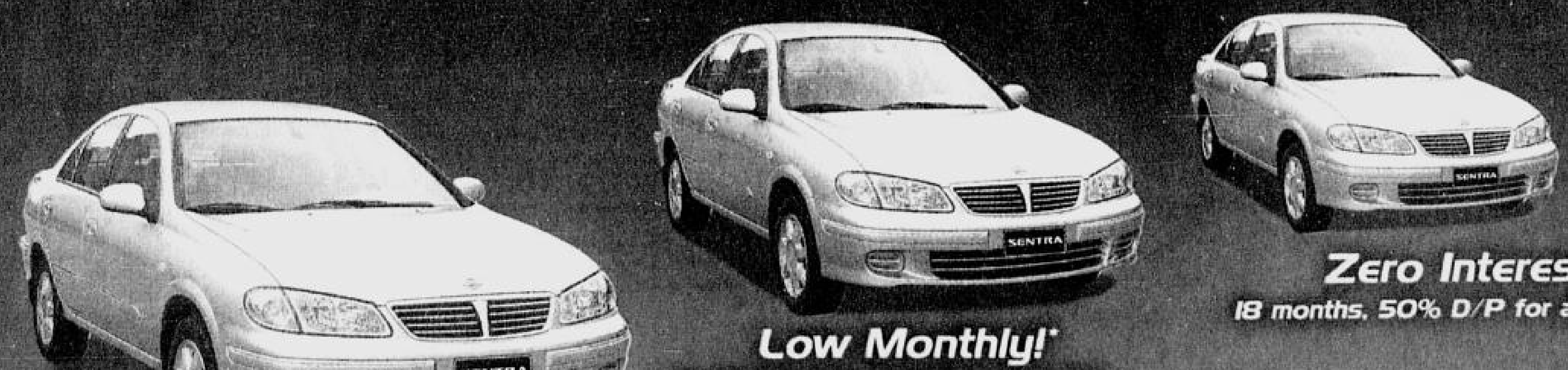

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LS M/T	7,500	93,120
Superio A/T	7,999	101,460
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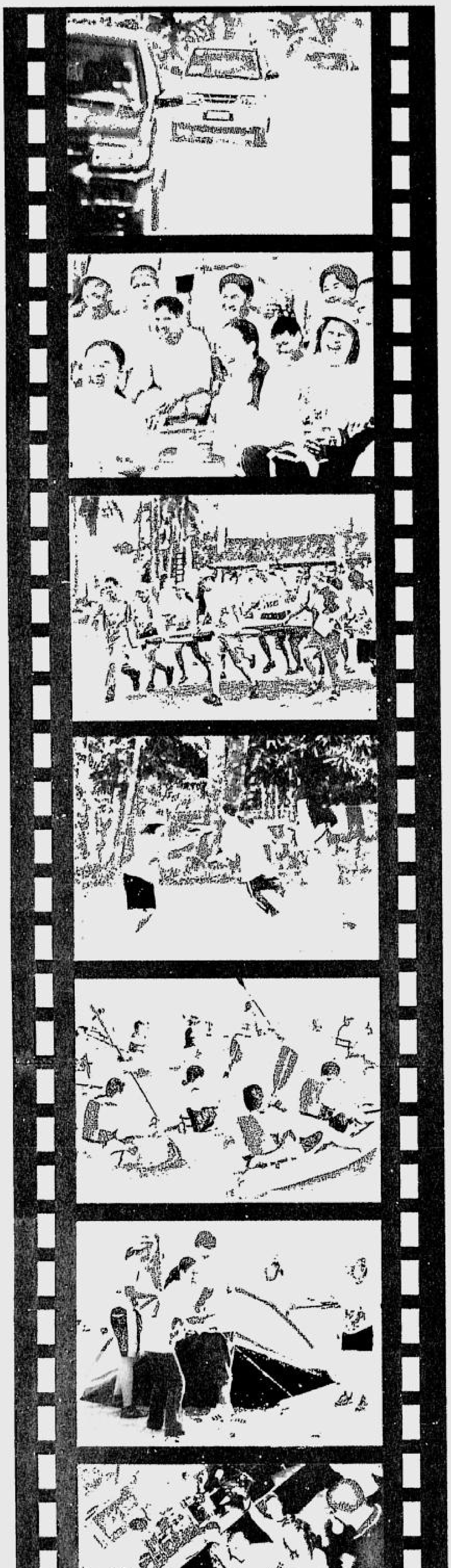

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Upon arrival at Cocogrove Resort in Laiya, Batangas, tensions were eased by a big lunch -- but another challenge awaits: the sports activities! The next two hours brought the participants to a challenging and fun-filled sequence of Flag Capture, Survivor Skills, Enduro and Kayaking, with the red team coming out as winners.

After some rest and dinner, everyone gathered by the stage for the awarding, where jubilant winners of the e-drive and sports activities claimed their cash and cool Samsung electronics from Isuzu executives. The night was capped with a party and a night at the event campsite, Survivor style.

The morning after saw happy and relaxed Isuzu owners exchanging banter over breakfast or enjoying the beach. The words on everyone's lips seemed to be "this is the life", and we agree.

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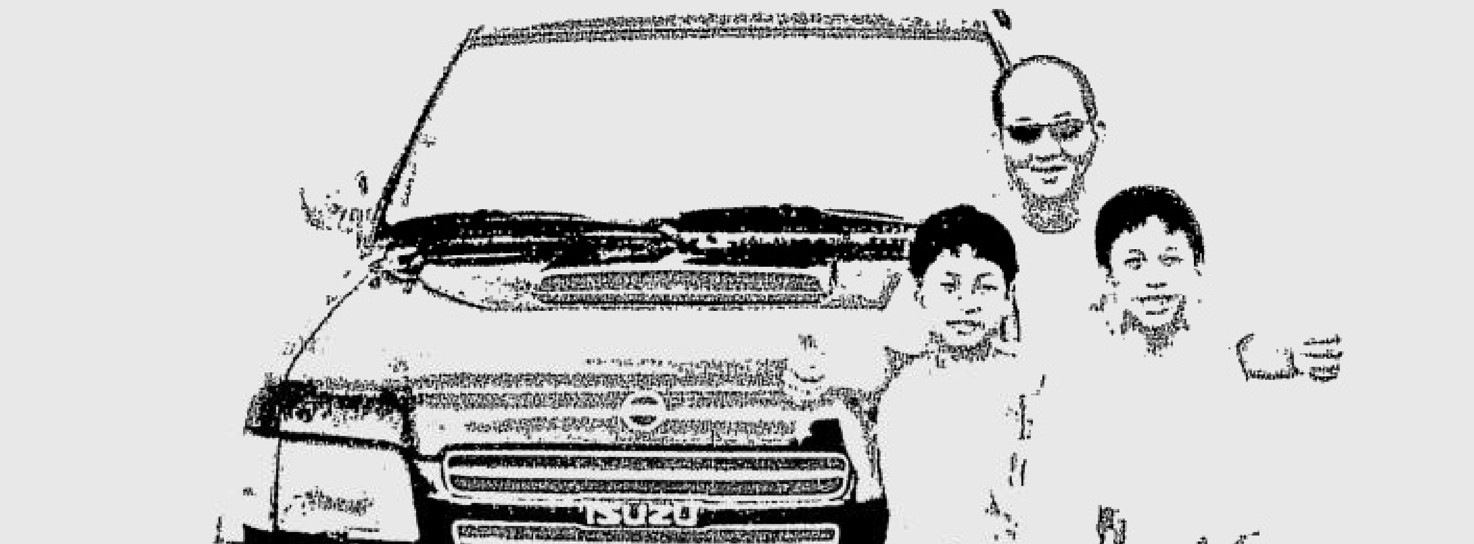

Editor Chelo Banal-Formoso

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LIFESTYLE Tastes

Dining, Hong Kong style /D2

ANTI Pasto with Pesto Vinaigrette

Recipes for simple but delicious holiday meals

KITCHEN RESCUE

Reggie Aspiras

IT'S Christmas time. Another year has come and gone. To all readers of Kitchen Rescue and those whose letters have brought me comfort, joy and great laughter, *maraming salamat*!

For those in search of a perfectly simple yet delicious holiday dinner, here are a couple of my favorite festive recipes. From me to you, Happy Christmas!

Anti Pasto with Pesto Vinaigrette

In a serving platter, arrange the following from the outside going to the center of the tray:

300 g prosciutto, thinly sliced
4 pcs large tomatoes, thinly sliced
6 pcs hard boiled eggs, sliced
2 balls fresh water-packed mozzarella cheese, drained and sliced
½ c kalamata olives, whole, placed on top of eggs
2 pcs large red bell peppers, roasted and thinly sliced, arranged on top of all the other ingredients

Drizzle with pesto vinaigrette.

Pesto Vinaigrette:

1 c fresh sweet basil, leaves only
1 pc garlic clove
½ tsp salt
1 tsp sugar
¾ c extra virgin olive oil

Process in a blender. Adjust the salt to taste. Add juice of ½ lemon.

Warm Couscous Salad

In a pan:
3 tbsp olive oil
¼ c chopped garlic
1 c chopped onions
generous pinch of saffron
1 ½ cup couscous

Mix well and make sure couscous is well coated with oil. Add stock, ¾ cup at a time to total 5 ¼ cups until couscous is soft. Continue mixing and season with salt and pepper.

Add:
1 tbsp olive oil

In another pan:
3 tbsp olive oil
1 pc chopped *chorizo*
½ c chopped shallots
½ kg shelled shrimps
¼ kg scallops
1 c peas
1 can bell pepper, julienned
1 c broth/clam stock
1 tsp salt
1 tsp pepper
clams (parboiled)

Cook for a while, then turn off fire. Add juice of 1 lemon.

May be served hot or cold. Put on top of couscous. Sprinkle chopped parsley.

In another bowl, combine:
juice of 2 lemons
½ tsp salt
½ tsp. pepper
¼ c olive oil
pepper flakes
saffron
1 tbsp tomato paste

Mix well and pour into the couscous. Mix again.

Prime Rib with Pepper Crust, Wine Gravy and Roasted Vegetables

Cooking Time:
20 mins/lb - rare
22 mins/lb - medium rare
24 mins/lb - medium well
26 mins/lb - well done

The cooking times are also applicable to lamb. Place rib on a baking pan. Prepare paste and crust.

Crust (good for 3-3.5 kilos)
In a mortar and pestle:
1 tbsp green peppercorn
1 tbsp pink peppercorn

Pound the peppercorn just enough to crack them open. Then add 1 tbsp sea salt or 1 ½ regular iodized salt

Set aside.

RECIPES/ D3

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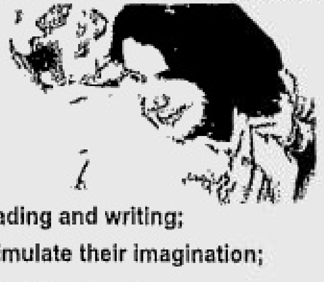

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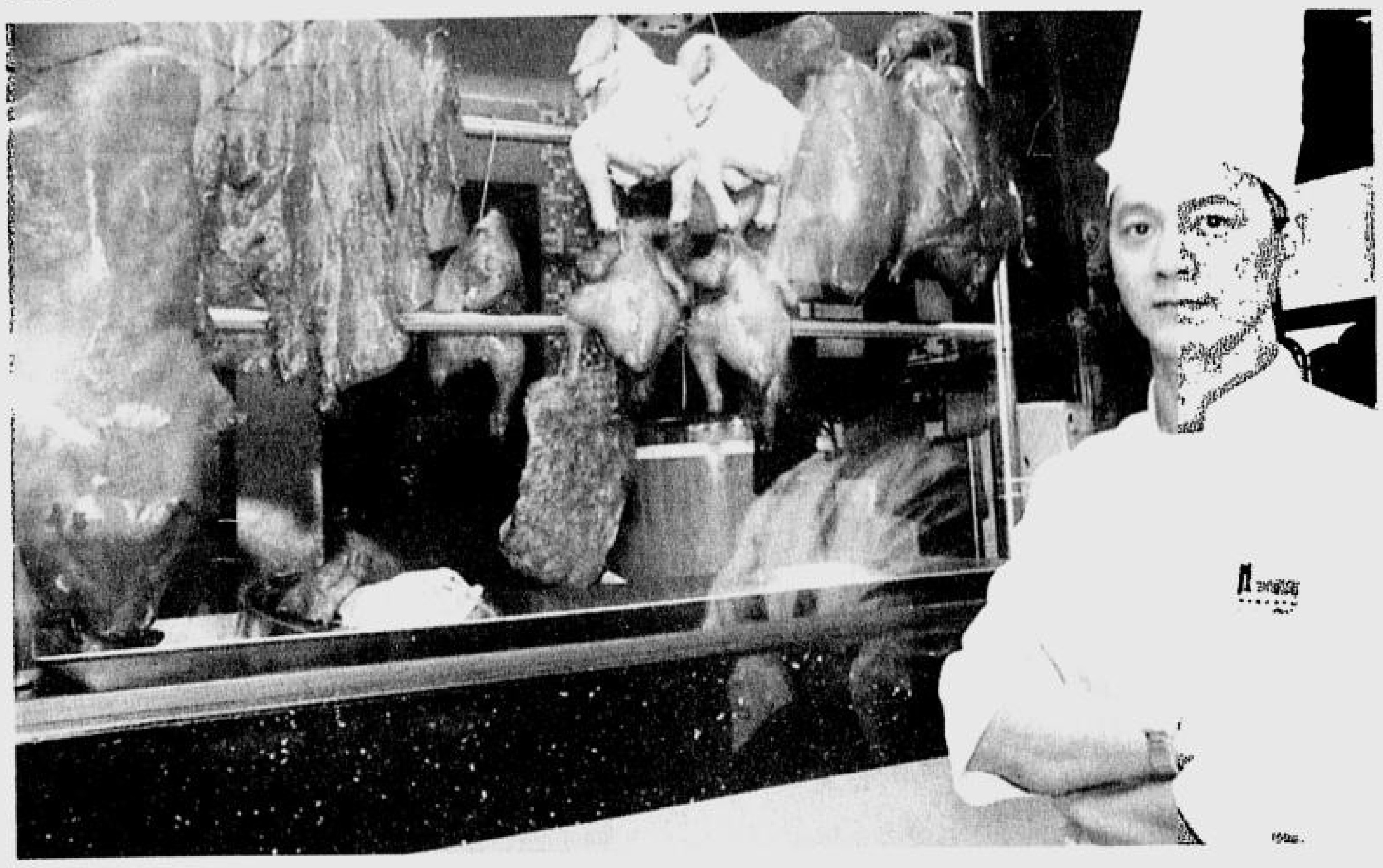
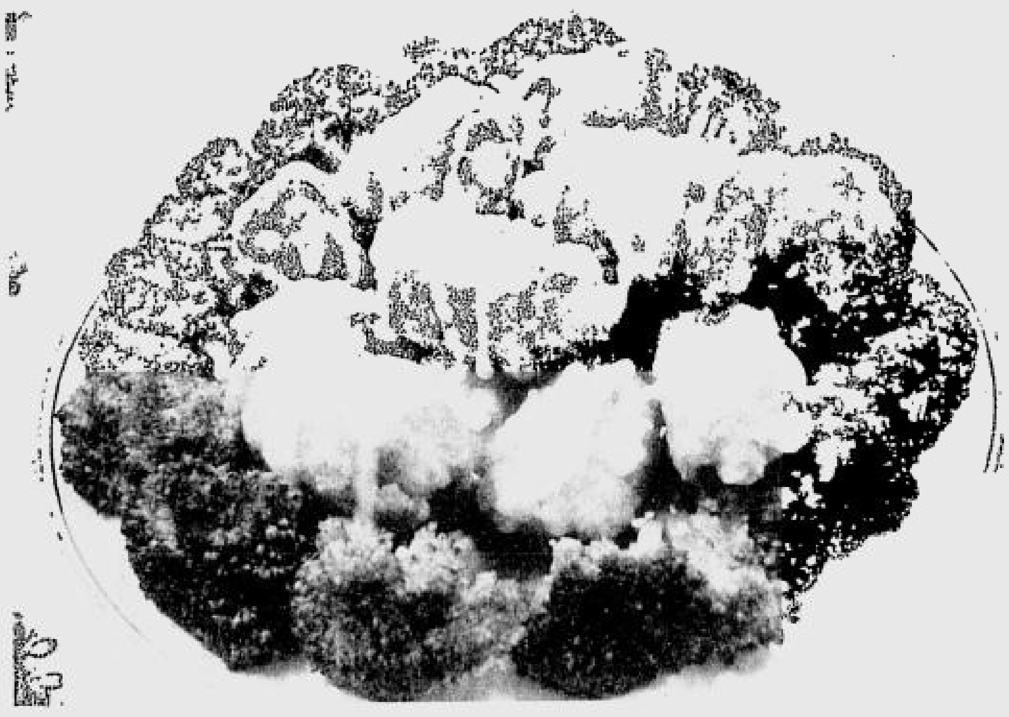


ORTIGAS might as well be Hong Kong if your prime consideration is Chef Lai Pak Dong's specials, roast duck, chicken and pork included.

PHOTOS BY ROMY HOMILLADA

Dining, HONG KONG style



PRAWN Bacon Roll

No need for Chinese lantern and dancing dragons at the Red Table—the Chinese flavor is all in the food

DEEP Fried Prawn in Szechuan Sauce

THERE is no red table in this restaurant although it is named the Red Table (tel. 6375831). The owners of this Hong-Kong style restaurant picked the color because it is the happiest and luckiest of colors among the Chinese, and it is their wish to make their place a starting point for, well, painting the town red.

No Chinese buntings or lanterns adorn the place; instead hanging from the red ceiling are kidney-shaped light boxes that give it a contemporary look. There are no Chinese brush paintings or dragons on the walls. A few Asian pottery pieces are displayed on shelves against a red wall, but you won't see them if you don't go to the tastefully designed restroom.

"Chinese restaurants even in Hong Kong no longer have traditional Chinese décor," says Kenneth Sytin, operations manager of the Red Table and part owner with his brothers Dominic, Rommel and Dennis. "The Chinese flavor is all in the food."

Having observed that, the brothers decided to hire an authentic Hong Kongsider as chef. Lai Pak Dong, who manned the Mactan Shangri-La kitchen for a time, now looks so at home standing next to the roast duck, chicken and pork window at the Red Table.

Guests don't really care if the kitchen god is the type who terrorizes his staff with a butcher knife as long as he serves good food. But, luckily for the Red Table, its chef is a pleasant enough fellow who also doesn't fret about making an impression and just focuses on the menu. Now this is very good for a kitchen that's bent on luring foodies who are used to flying to Hong Kong for Chinese cuisine.

Many residents and employees in the Ortigas area have dropped in at the Red Table for both lunch and dinner. Five function rooms are capable of seating up to 70 people for private meeting or parties. The Red Table can host a good-sized banquet (up to 220 people).

Chef Lai's specials include Prawn Bacon Roll, Crispy Seafood Roll, Crabmeat and Claw with Sticky Rice, Spareribs Mosek Style (hot pot), Steamed Stuffed Broccoli Flower, Deep-Fried Prawn in Szechuan Sauce, Crispy Deep-Fried Fish Fillet, Green Soup with Shredded Chicken and Mushroom, Cheese Fried Prawn and Shrimp Taro Rice.

Red Table presents duck in different ways: Roasted Peking Duck, Taro Duck, 8 Treasure with Braised Duck, Roast Duck on Rice and in combination. Its dim sum offerings are topped by Crabfat Siomai Green Hakaw, Scallop Dumpling, Seafood Roll, Beef, Asado and Shrimp Chongfan.

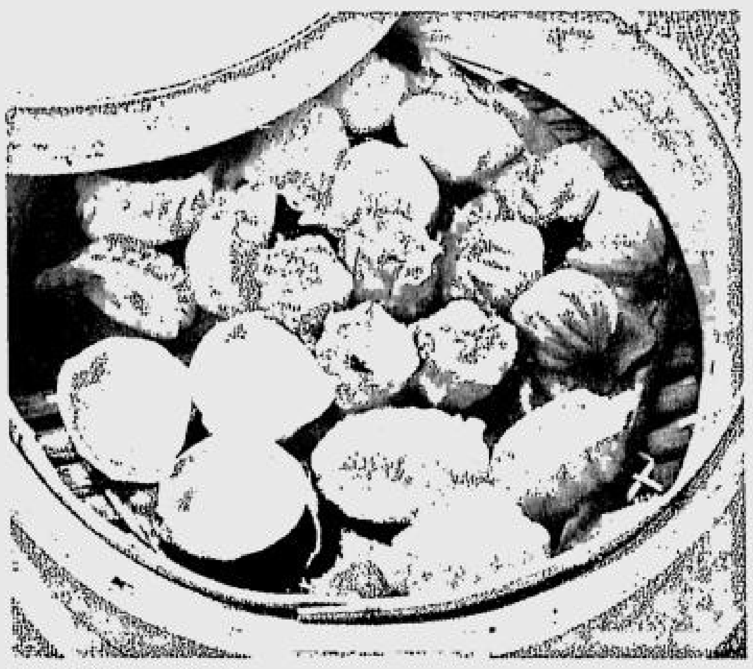
Stellar among the seafood dishes are Abalone with Vegetable in Oyster Sauce, Abalone with Sea Cucumber in Oyster Sauce and Steamed Lapulapu.

Kenneth works in tandem with Gilbert Gillette Garcia, who is food and beverage manager. Both are also in charge of the Congo Grill, the first restaurant that the Sytin brothers opened when they decided to diversify to the food business.

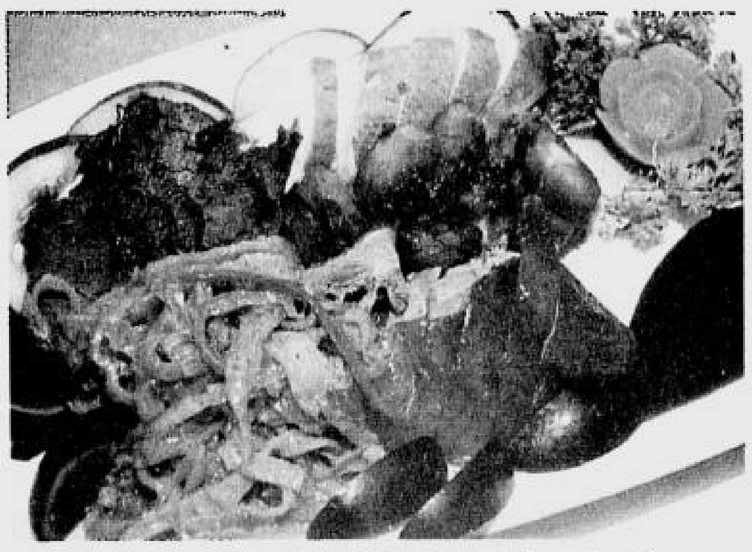
Garcia joined the Congo Grill as chef after a stint as culinary instructor at Center for Culinary Arts. He seems to have mastered the balancing act with Kenneth because they seem to be always there to give suggestions to first-time guests or personally welcome back returning customers.

Red Table, located in El Pueblo Real de Manila, Ortigas Center, Pasig, is open 11 a.m. to 11 p.m Monday to Sunday.

CONTEMPORARY interiors are a surprise in a restaurant that serves authentic Hong Kong cuisine.

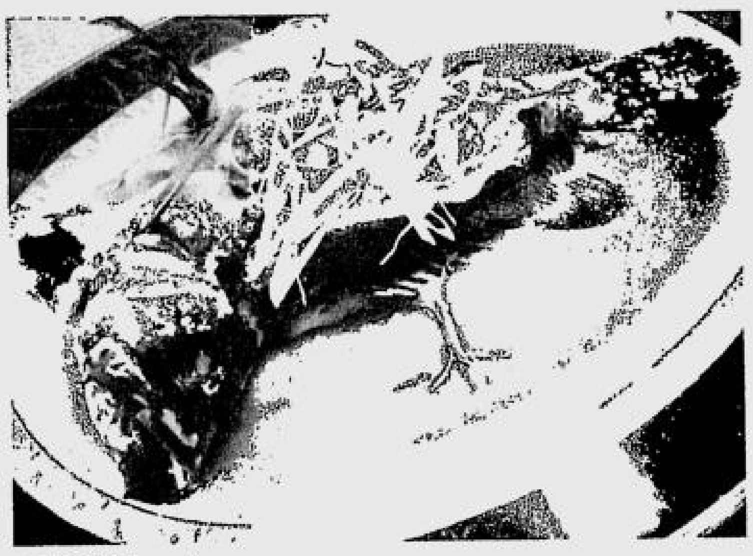


DIM SUM Combination

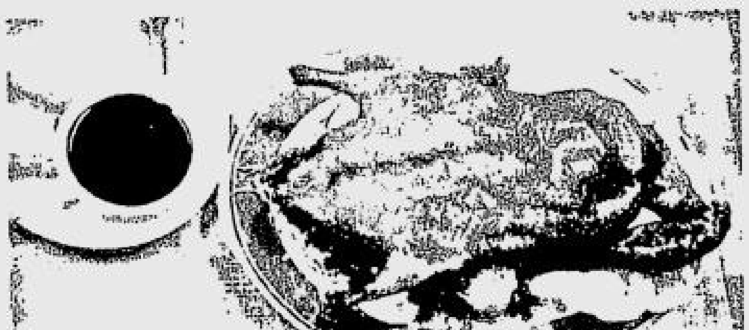


APPETIZER combination plate of Hong Kong pork asado, white chicken, soya chicken and roast duck.

SHARKSFIN Supreme



STEAMED Lapulapu



PEKING Duck roasted two way

CHINESE goes minimalist

Special holiday buffets

DINING OUT

THE MANILA Pavilion's Café Coquilla prepares an impressive buffet of local and international favorites this holiday season. *Noche buena* on Christmas Eve, 6-10:30 pm, will have Turkey Vegetable Croquette, Roast Pork Leg, Cabbage with Apple Raisin Salad, Pork Tenderloin in Peppercorn Sauce and a Mini Pizza station. For Christmas Fun Day Brunch, 10:30 a.m.-3 p.m., children will get to meet Santa Claus and clowns. The New Year's Eve spread, 6-10:30 p.m., includes Roast Turkey Platter with Cranberry Sauce, Rib Eye of Beef with Yolkshire Pudding and Bone in Ham with Pineapple Sauce. New Year's Day Brunch with a Punch, 10:30 a.m.-3 p.m., will feature mascots, clowns, games and surprises for kids. Call 5261212 local 2318.

MAKATI Shangri-La's buffet spread

MAKATI Shangri-La marks the holidays with several activities and treats. The Makati High School Chorale and Angklung Ensemble will sing Christmas carols 7-7:45 p.m., Dec. 20-23. Santa Claus will have a Meet n' Greet session with hotel guests and their children at the main lobby 7-10 p.m. Dec. 24, and 12 noon-3 p.m. Dec. 25. The lobby also features a Christmas Corner with imported European chocolates, pralines, deli items, wines and others in attractive hampers for gifts. Island Café has a buffet spread of Filipino, Asian and Continental dishes for lunch and dinner Dec. 24, 25 and 31. There will be a 10 p.m. Christmas Eve Mass at the hotel's Rizal Ballroom. On Dec. 24, 25 and 31, Shang Palace offers family-style set menus for lunch and dinner for groups of at least 10 persons. Lunch and dinner buffets are also available at the Japanese restaurant Inagiku Dec. 24, 25 and 31. Makati Shangri-La's red offers a six-course set dinner menu on Dec. 24, and a seven-course set dinner menu on New Year's Eve complete with a complimentary bottle of wine. Call 8400884.

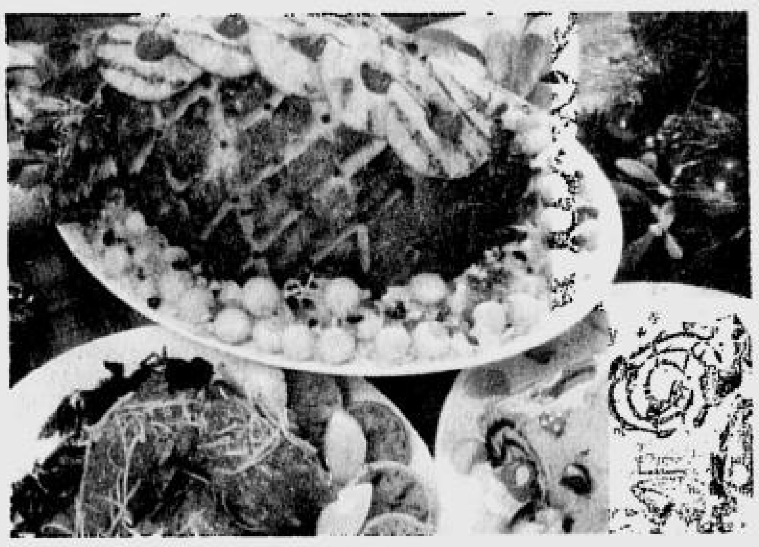
THE RICHMONDE Hotel's Grill features Christmas Eve and Christmas Day buffets at P775 net per person, inclusive of one round of iced tea. For New Year's Eve, the Richmonde Grill's buffet costs P850 net per person, inclusive of sparkling wine and party favors. Call 6387777 local 3409.

DISCOVERY Suites' Café Berrio presents a Christmas Eve Medley set dinner 7-11:30 p.m. Executive chef Rick Abasta is also preparing special treats for Christmas and New Year diners. Call 6352222 local 3805.

RAJ Indian Restaurant is now open on Sundays for dinner.
Special Christmas set menus for groups are available for P550+ per person. For delivery, minimum of P1,500+ within Makati and Manila, call a day in advance. Raj is at 1820 Maria Orosa Street, Malate, Manila 1004. Call 5254858.

ILUSTRADO offers Christmas Tienda, wooden gift crates filled with wine, spicy cheeseball and home-baked sultana and banana bread and other goodies. Special menus will be available Dec. 24 and 31. *Bibingka* and *puto bumbong* are available daily, 10 a.m.-8 p.m., until Jan. 3. Ilustrado is on Calle Real, in Intramuros. Call 5273674/75.

ANNAM Vietnamese Restaurant is now also open on Sundays for dinner. Special Christmas set menus for groups are available for P550+ per person. For delivery, minimum of P1,500+ within Makati and Manila, call a day in advance. Annam is at 1820 Maria Orosa Street, Malate, Manila. Call 5254858.



RICHMONDE Hotel's offerings

Recipes for simple but delicious holiday meals

From page D1

Paste:
In a bowl, mix:
¼ c butter, softened
2 tsp Dijon mustard
1 ½ tbsp flour
1 tbsp brown sugar
½ tsp fine salt
1 tsp all spice powder

It has to be "pasty" in texture. Spread evenly on the top part of the rib. Top with mixed peppercorn (crust). Roast for 1 hour, covered at 350 Fahrenheit. Remove the cover once rib turns brown.

Gravy:

In a saucepan, pour the drippings from the rib roast then add 1 cup red wine

Let wine reduce then add:
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
2 tsp Knorr Brattensauce (available in Santis)
2 c beef stock

Add salt and pepper to taste. Thicken with roux.

Roasted Vegetables

Prepare a nice, big squash. Take the top off (with the stem). Remove the seeds. Brush inside with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake in oven at 350 Fahrenheit for 20 minutes or until inside of squash is tender.

Slice eggplants, zucchini, potatoes, tomatoes and onions. Slice thinly and coat with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Grill until done.

Arrange in layers slices of mixed vegetables inside the squash. Top the last layer with parmigiano, mozzarella, sprigs of rosemary, freshly cracked peppercorn. Bake for 10 minutes or until cheese melts. Serve the whole squash.

Vanilla Ham with Cherry and Sultana Foccia

Vanilla Ham
1 pc cured ham

Brush ham with Dijon mustard (top part only).

Coat the ham heavily with dark brown sugar.

Bake for 15 minutes, covered, at 350 Fahrenheit then uncover and continue baking for another 10-15 minutes. Garnish with basil leaves.

Sauce:

In the same pan used for baking ham, add:
2 tbsp butter
2 tsp chopped garlic
4 packs vanilla sugar
1 tbsp maple syrup
¼ c white wine
½ c chicken stock

Cook all ingredients while mixing them. Add roux (1 tbsp each of flour and butter, mixed together) to thicken it. Then, strain to remove any lumps. Serve on the side.

Cherry and Sultana Foccia

In a bowl, combine:
1 tbsp yeast
1 c warm water
1 tsp sugar

Mix and let stand for 15 minutes or until bubbly. After 15 minutes, add:
1 c warm water
1 tsp salt
1 c sultanas or raisins
1/3 c brown sugar
1 tsp cinnamon powder
2 tsp olive oil

Mix well then add 4 ½ cups of all-purpose flour, a little at a time. Once it is hard to mix, start kneading. When dough is not sticky, stop kneading and place in an oiled bowl. Let it rise for 1 hour or until it doubles in size.

After 1 hour, roll out dough on a floured table (flour and polenta) to fit size of a jelly roll pan. Sprinkle polenta on pan before putting dough.

Brush dough with softened butter. Decorate with pitted cherry, rosemary sprigs, 2 tbsp brown sugar and sprinkle with sea salt. Let it stand for another 30 minutes or until it doubles in size. Bake at 350 Fahrenheit for 20 minutes.

Tarta de Leche Milk Cake

Sponge Cake:
Pre-heat oven to 350 Fahrenheit
In a bowl:
5 pcs egg yolk
1 c white sugar
Beat for 8-10 minutes.

Sift together 3 times in another bowl:
1 ½ c cake flour
1 tbsp baking powder
2 tsp cinnamon
In a separate bowl:
5 pieces egg white
When frothy, add:
½ cup white sugar

Continue beating until stiff peaks form. Pour dry ingredients alternately with ½ cup milk to the egg yolk mixture. Scrape side of bowl. Fold egg white mixture in 3 batches: 1st 2 batches in mixer and the 3rd batch by hand, gently.

Grease, line with parchment paper and grease again a big round baking pan. Pour mixture into a pan and bake for 40 minutes. Check after 20 minutes.

Milk Syrup:
In a bowl, mix:
1 c evaporated milk
1 c condensed milk
1 c heavy cream
1 pc vanilla bean

Mix well and transfer to a pan and cook until slightly thickened.

Compote:
In a pan, combine:
1 c water
½ c white sugar
Bring to a boil then add:
1 c raisins
1 c frozen cranberries or strawberries
1 c walnuts
¼ tsp ground cloves
1 pc cinnamon stick

Thicken with cornstarch dispersed in 1 tbsp water.

Meringue
In a pan:
½ c water
1 c white sugar

Let it boil until temperature reaches 240-245 Fahrenheit.

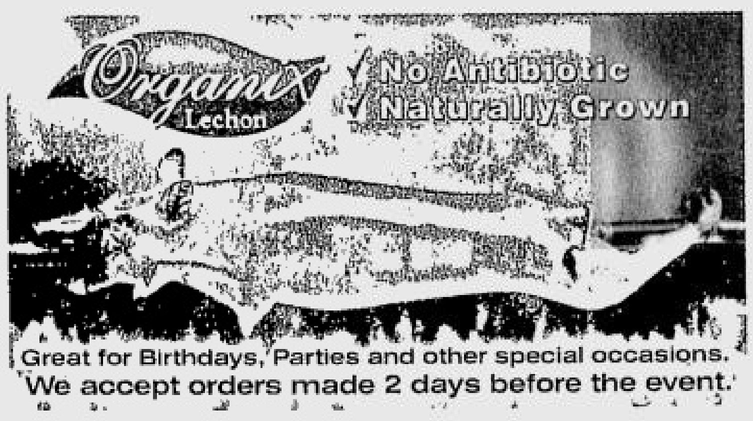
In a bowl, beat 4 pieces egg white until soft peaks form.

Pour syrup slowly to the egg whites while continuously beating. Continue until stiff peaks form.

Decorate cake with the meringue. Make small peaks on top of the cake. Bake for 3 minutes until it turns light brown in color.

Garnish with cranberries or cherries with mint leaves. Serve rum milk syrup on the side.

E-mail reggie1@skynet.net



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7. VIRGINIA MERILLES
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Response to letter from lactose-intolerant customers

THE CONSUMER
Marietta Velasco Giron

IN this column last week, we featured the letter of R. Cabalfin (Ach13boy@yahoo.com) asking food establishments to be open about the ingredients of dishes on their menu. He is lactose intolerant (unable to digest milk) and suffers from ulcerative colitis, so he has to be careful about what he eats so as not to aggravate his condition.

We received several feedback in the mail, among them from two concerned Pinoys in the United States and from Zonito Torrevillas, McDonald's public relations manager.

Torrevillas wrote: "We understand that our customers need the essential information to assist them in making sensible food choices. Therefore, we have asked our menu management and quality assurance team about the McDonald's products mentioned in the letter.

"Chicken breading, spaghetti sauce and apple pie are totally lactose-free. For customers who react to very small amounts of lactose, or those who have to limit their intake of food that contains it, we offer them ketchup instead of gravy… We want our customers to make informed choices, as well as to know important facts about the food that we offer."

Feedback from readers

Nicky Reyes of Sacramento, California said he never heard of lactose intolerance until he went to the US. He sent this e-mail:

"It was only in the US where I discovered that I was lactose intolerant. Fortunately, there are options here like lactose-free dairy foods. There is also lactase (an enzyme) supplement that can be bought over the counter that you can take before eating dairy products. It helps in the digestion of lactose. Also available at health stores like GNC is lactase enzyme.

"We should watch out for vitamin supplements, as well as medications, that are lactose-based. Sensitive individuals have to ask their doctors if their medications are lactose-based. Better yet, read the product labels. Here in the US, most package labels indicate whether or not the product contains lactose.

"Lactose intolerant people can also benefit from heating the milk, almost to boiling point, before drinking. Heat (supposedly) kills the lactose content of milk."

Aida Tanglao Aguas (aidaaguas@hotmail.com) said that in the US, ingredients of food products were written on the package while restaurant had the ingredients of dishes in their menus. She also said she could buy Nestlé's lactose-free powdered milk and baby's milk in the market.

She added: "Many Filipinos do not notice they are lactose-intolerant because they do not drink milk, the major source of calcium needed by the bones. They're not properly informed by health authorities or given the needed care. Women, particularly those in pre-menopausal and menopausal ages, need 1,200 mg or more of calcium, depending on age and bone density. The 30 year olds are advised by health experts to consume more milk and other calcium-rich foods for bone strength. Specialists suggested recently that even middle-age men should consume more calcium.

"Food products are properly labeled to prevent adverse consequences that could be fatal. The letter sent to your column last week by a lactose-intolerant reader gives us a very important message."

Calling the Adboard

A concerned consumer (0917-8314639@globetextm.com.ph) sent us this comment on a corned beef ad currently airing over the radio:

"Why did the Advertising Board of the Philippines allow a radio advertisement of a local corned beef product that tends to inform? The ad starts with a gay-sounding person singing "Bahay Kubo."

It goes on to say those who don't want to be like the singer (meaning effeminate), should stop eating vegetables. The ad ends with a macho-sounding guy singing and saying he is all-man because he eats (brand) corned beef everyday.

"The ad is offensive on many levels. Among other things, it makes eating vegetables a sissy practice and implies that homosexuality can happen as easily as by eating vegetables."

Talk about taste and values in advertising. Some friends from the media were taking pot shots recently at local ads that didn't bother about ethics or imparting good values to viewers, particularly kids.

Someone mentioned an old television ad of a toilet paper that left a bad taste. If we remember correctly, it was about a girl who answered the call of nature in a rice field, and the jingle was "*Sa bukid walang papel… Ikiskis mo sa pilapil.*" It certainly was an offensive ad in many ways.

Publicist Manny Azarcon, one of the media friends, recalled a previous ad that portrayed a fellow drinking a soda product while hanging on to the back of a jeepney.

Alerted by the message implied by the billboard displayed prominently along Edsa, former Metro Manila Development Authority traffic manager Gen. Romy Maganto had it removed. It obviously was against rules of traffic safety.

Azarcon also mentioned a similar ad. This time the guy was eating biscuits.

Another friend called attention to a current corned beef ad on TV he described a "toro ad." The ad showed a man's ears smoking as he ate the advertised product. A woman was shown using her apron to ward off the man's overheated advances.

Someone is also unhappy about a shampoo ad showing a girl pouring water on a guy's head: "Viewed during prime time programs, the advertisement may be bad for impressionable kids. Whether the girl poured the water on the guy out of jest or as a retaliatory gesture, the ad does not set a good example to kids."

We agree wholeheartedly with our media friends. Advertisements need not be preachy about right values and good moral conduct, but they should not violate good taste and ethics.

E-mail mgiron@i-manila.com.ph or lifestyle@inquirer.com.ph

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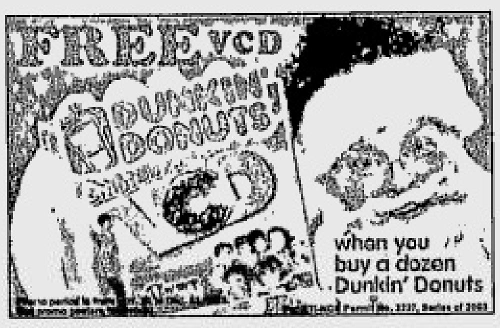
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AURELIO'S
roast turkey

Freshly made party perk-ups

DINING OUT

AURELIO'S offers roast turkey, roast beef and pork. The US roast turkey comes in two sizes, medium (5-6 kilos) and large (10-11 kilos). The roast turkey is accompanied with choice of meat, oyster or chestnut stuffing; mashed potato, corn, cranberry sauce and giblet gravy. Also available are Black Angus roast beef, Australian Roast Sirloin, Whole Australian Roast Calf and specialty food orders. Call 7269329/ 7267321/ 7217952.

KIMPURA offers sushi and sashimi party perk-ups for dine-in or take-out. Available are two sets of sashimi platters: sashimi moriawase de luxe good for 4-5 persons (P850+) that includes tuna, shake, blue marlin belly, cuttlefish and kani; and sashimi moriawase premium (P1,650+) which has tuna, shake, hamachi, octopus, ama ebi, uni and ikura. Both come with wasabi, soy sauce and lemon. Sushi platters include Kiku party set A which has chiku, nigiri/syo, kappa maki and osinko maki; Sakura party set B, chiku sushi, nigiri, ebiko roll, kappa maki and cal roll kani (P950+) and Botan party set C, nigiri sushi, futomaki, ebiko roll and kappa maki (P1,350+). Kimpura is located at Glorietta 2, Ayala Center, Makati (tels. 8932307/ 8924456) and Greenhills Shopping Center, San Juan (7218816/69).

JADE Garden Chinese restaurant features set menus, ranging from P2,800 to P7,700, good for 10-12 persons. For every reservation of 10 tables, the resto offers one complimentary Peking duck gift certificate. Diners get two free bottles of French wine for one whole order of its suckling pig, Cantonese style, and one free bottle for every half order of the same. Jade Garden is located at Greenbelt 1, Ayala Center, Makati (tels. 8124548/ 8922319).

OUTBACK Restaurant offers Beef Adelaide, Canberra Hamburger Steak, Aussie Salpicado, The Outback Special, Rockhampton Rib Eye, North Atlantic Salmon, Grilled Pork Chop, Chicken on the Barbie, and Queensland Chicken and Shrimp, desserts Chocolate Thunder from Down Under, Cheesecake Olivia, Maryborough Chocolate Cake and Granny's Apple Pie.

Outback Restaurant has branches at Glorietta 4 in Makati City, Libis in Quezon City and Alabang Town Center.

POPEYES Chicken and Biscuits features What's Your Flavor promo until Dec. 31. Chicken Fillet Sandwich will go for P30 until Dec. 22. Onion Rings will go for P15 on Dec. 23-31. Popeyes is located at SM Southmall, Robinsons Metro East, Robinsons Place Ermita, New Farmers Plaza, Robinsons Galleria, Filinvest Festival Mall-Alabang, Greenhills Shopping Center, SM Bicutan, Greenbelt 1 Ayala Center and SM Pampanga.

GREENWICH introduces Chicken Pasta—pasta with tender chicken chunks in a mildly spicy tomato sauce seasoned with herbs.

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Dec 1-4 Dec 15-18
Dec 8-11 Dec 22-24
Mon-Thurs 3pm & 5pm
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How about a little Christmas character?
Sony Ericsson
Happy Holidays!
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Sony Ericsson
Season's Greetings!
NOKIA
Feliz Navidad!
NOKIA
Don't forget my gift ;-)

the Christmas StereoTypes

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MABINI ☎ 525.1474	AFTER 8/KOOLJACKS EMMANUELLE	OPEN FROM 6PM TO 6AM NO ENTRANCE FEE
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NOVALICHES ☎ 936 9757	GABRIELA M-PEOPLE/SERSIDE	OPEN FROM 6PM TO 5AM BLUJONX EVERY FRI. OF DEC.
BIÑAN ☎ (049)511.7268	ICE KENDI VERSE 2/MIXED-UP	OPEN FROM 6PM TO 5AM NO ENTRANCE FEE
TIA MARIA'S	TIA MARIA'S	TIA MARIA'S
JUPITER ☎ 890.4735	0 2 7 3RD MOVEMENT	NO ENTRANCE FEE
REMEDIOS ☎ 522 0429	MAJOR 7 SYMPOSIUM	NO ENTRANCE FEE
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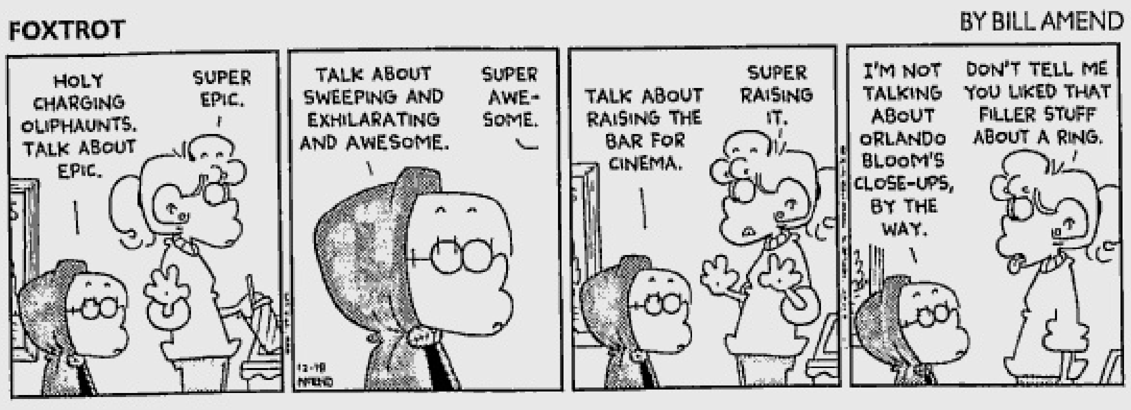
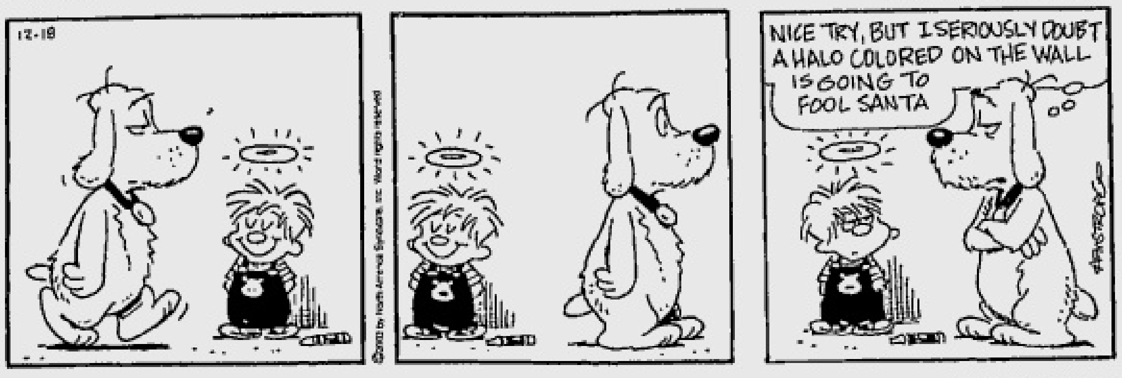
DECEMBER 18 THURSDAY

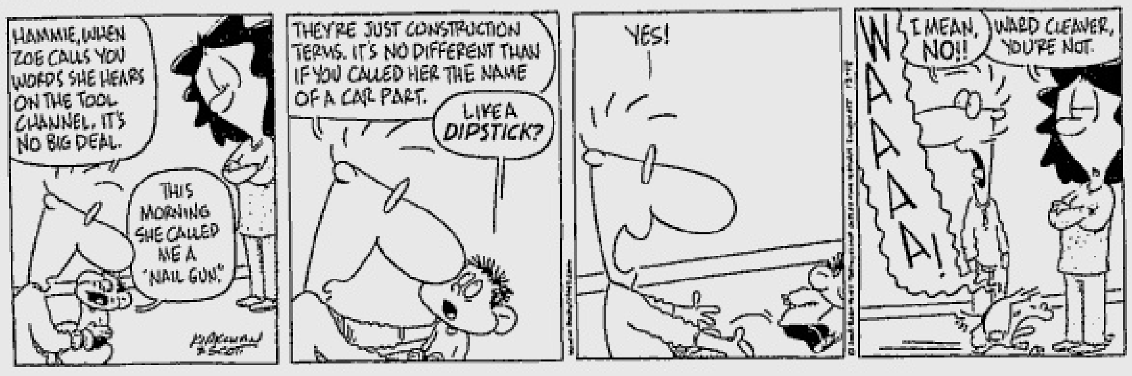
FOXTROT BY BILL AMEND


HOLY CHARGING OLIPHAUNTS. TALK ABOUT EPIC.
SUPER EPIC.
TALK ABOUT SWEEPING AND EXHILARATING AND AWESOME.
SUPER AWE-SOME.
TALK ABOUT RAISING THE BAR FOR CINEMA.
SUPER RAISING IT.
I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT ORLANDO BLOOM'S CLOSE-UPS, BY THE WAY.
DON'T TELL ME YOU LIKED THAT FILLER STUFF ABOUT A RING.
12-18

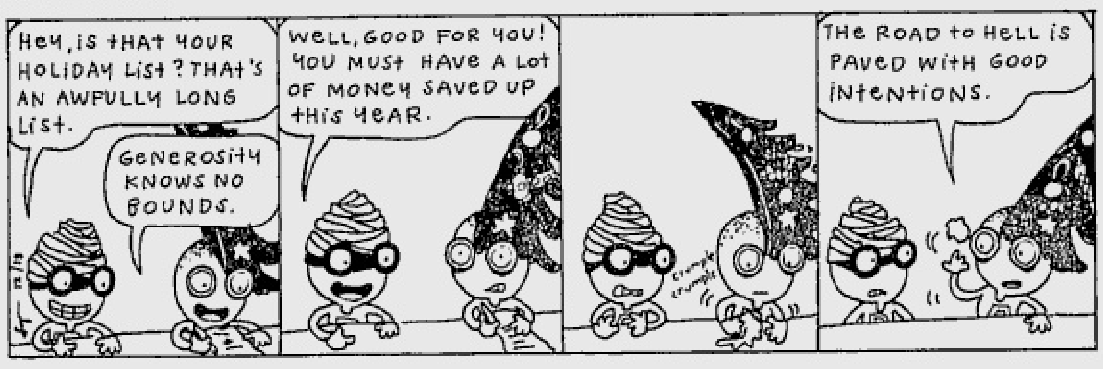
MARVIN BY TOM ARMSTRONG


12-18
NICE TRY, BUT I SERIOUSLY DOUBT A HALO COLORED ON THE WALL IS GOING TO FOOL SANTA
ARMSTRONG

BABY BLUES BY JERRY SCOTT


HAMMIE, WHEN ZOE CALLS YOU WORDS SHE HEARS ON THE TOOL CHANNEL, IT'S NO BIG DEAL.
THIS MORNING SHE CALLED ME A "NAIL GUN."
THEY'RE JUST CONSTRUCTION TERMS. IT'S NO DIFFERENT THAN IF YOU CALLED HER THE NAME OF A CAR PART.
LIKE A DIPSTICK?
YES!
WAAAA!
I MEAN, NO!!
WARD CLEAVER, YOU'RE NOT.
KIRKMAN & SCOTT

ATOMO AND WEBOY BY LYRA GARCELLANO


Hey, is that your holiday list? That's an awfully long list.
Generosity knows no bounds.
Well, good for you! You must have a lot of money saved up this year.
crumple crumple
The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

YOU BORN TODAY: You're persevering and persistent. You're not afraid to go after whatever you want. Furthermore, your dreams are big, and your long-term projects are sometimes breathtaking. You are a strong influence on those around you. Major projects will be wrapped up this year, as you prepare for something new to come.

Birthdate of: Brad Pitt, actor; Katie Holmes, actress; Leonard Maltin, movie critic.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): You need to escape from your daily routine today. Take a different route to or from work; visit different shops; check out bookstores and libraries.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): Set aside some time today to deal with insurance, bills, debt, mortgages, shared property and estates. Tie up these loose ends.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Give real thought and consideration to your spouse or a close friend today. Remember the saying: "When dancing life's dance, keep your eyes on your partner."

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): Think of two things you can do to improve your health. (It's easier to begin by refraining from old habits rather than by initiating new ones.)

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): Focus some of your energy toward activities with children today. Your own inner child is alive and well now. You feel playful, prankish and eager for fun and romance.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): A family member needs your attention today. In fact, domestic matters are a prime concern for you this week. Attend to repairs; plan time for quality conversations.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): Shopping for purchases that will enhance the beauty of —, your home can please you today. You might find something modern and unusual that pleases you. (You're very sensitive to your surroundings.)

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): Moneymaking ideas occur to you today. Enjoy the fact that you're considering a major purchase (something you can be proud of). Write your ideas down. They could prove to be profitable!

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Three planets are in your sign now—the Sun, Mercury and Pluto. That's why you want to improve your appearance and why you have a strong need to talk to others now.

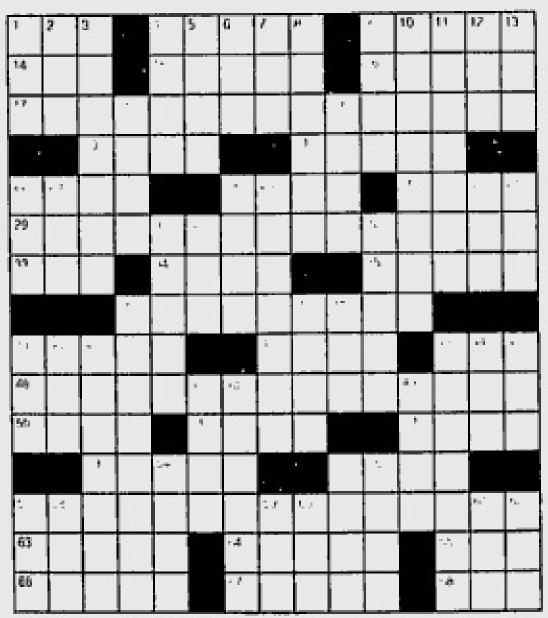
CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19) Renovations, redecorating, residential moves and visiting guests are some of the reasons increased activity takes place at home now and for the next few weeks. Just accept this with patience and a smile.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): A good heart-to-heart talk with a friend can lift your spirits today. Friendship is important to you. You feel uplifted and reassured knowing that others care for you.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): A boss or someone important might ask you to do a special task. Don't be afraid to take this job on. You will do well at it, despite your doubts.

DAILY CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Madrid Mrs.
4 Ruth's mother-in-law
9 Facing the pitcher
14 Squirmy catch
15 Actress Verdugo
16 Semisolid fats
17 Start of rhyme
20 Wilander of tennis
21 Foundation
22 Pairs
24 Man from Tarsus
26 Wet pavement worry
29 Part 2 of rhyme
33 West of films
34 Way off
35 Shop machine
36 Qualified release
39 In that place
42 "Comin' _ the Rye"
43 Lindstrom or Zadora
46 Part 3 of rhyme
50 VOA group
51 Disencumbers
52 Vases with bases
53 Director Rene
55 Trailing the field
57 End of rhyme
63 King of Judea
64 Bring up
65 Schuss
66 "Waiting for Lefty" playwright
67 Business dress
68 Slugger Williams



By Robert H. Wolfe
North Woodemere, NY
12/18/03

DOWN
1 Mermaid's milieu
2 Sleep letters
3 Fashionable as pie
4 Barber's call
5 Landon and others
6 "__ the fields we go.."
7 Alphabet trio
8 Metrical unit
9 Pub pints
10 Amulet
11 Beef cut
12 Wood-finishing tool
13 Half a fly?
18 Space grp.
19 Island near Java
22 Weir
23 Actress Merkel
24 Sudden pain
25 Added bubbles to
27 Sort of ending?
28 Tweedle ending?
30 Showed concern
31 Unk. visitor
32 Above it all
36 Parcel out in advance
37 Now hear _ !
38 Damaged mdse. tag
39 Wk. part
40 Santa chuckles
41 Connoisseur
43 Most saucy
44 Writer Fleming
45 Pompous fool
47 Chitown paper
48 Employers
49 __ for life
54 Goes on to say
55 Itemization
56 High cards
57 Comic Margaret
58 U.K. rel. book
59 French water
60 Seven on a sundial
61 Just make do
62 Zany Caesar

Wednesday's Puzzle Solved

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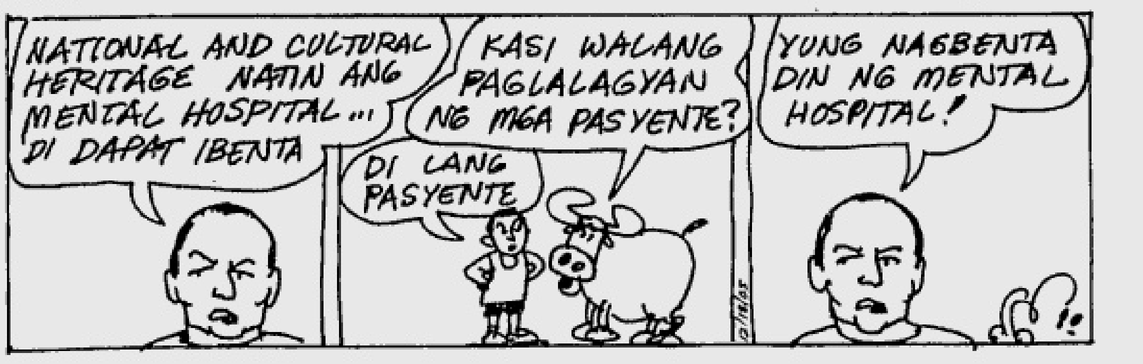
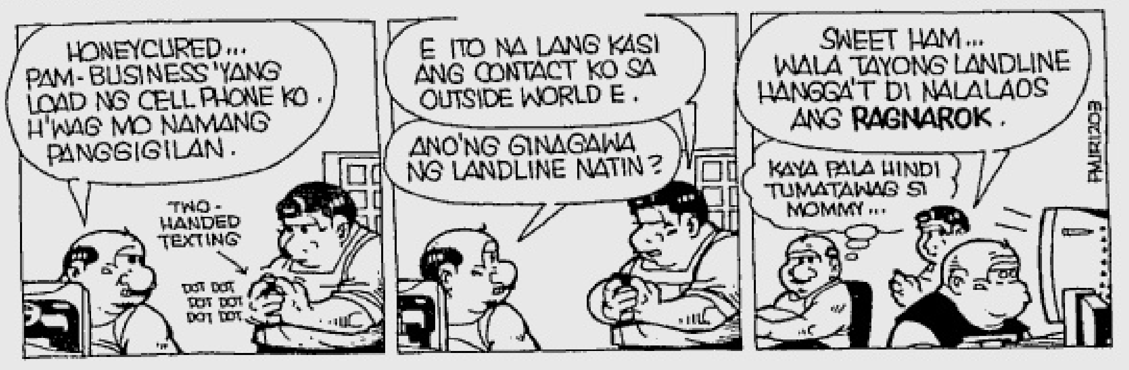
12/18/03

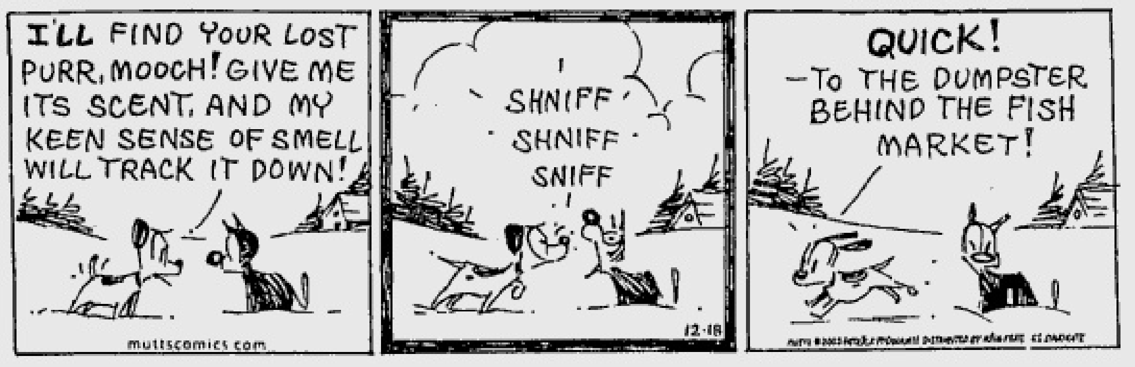
A. LIPIN BY JESS ABRERA


NATIONAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE NATIN ANG MENTAL HOSPITAL... DI DAPAT IBENTA
KASI WALANG PAGLALAGYAN NG MGA PASYENTE?
DI LANG PASYENTE
YUNG NAGBENTA DIN NG MENTAL HOSPITAL!
12/18/03

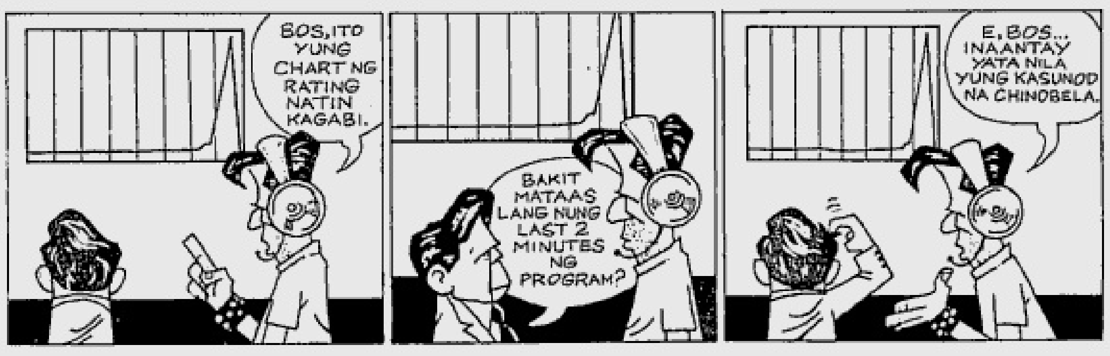
PUGAD BABOY BY P.M. JUNIOR


HONEYCURED... PAM-BUSINESS 'YANG LOAD NG CELL PHONE KO. H'WAG MO NAMANG PANGGIGILAN.
TWO-HANDED TEXTING
DOT DOT DOT DOT DOT DOT
E ITO NA LANG KASI ANG CONTACT KO SA OUTSIDE WORLD E.
ANO'NG GINAGAWA NG LANDLINE NATIN?
SWEET HAM... WALA TAYONG LANDLINE HANGGA'T DI NALALAOS ANG RAGNAROK.
KAYA PALA HINDI TUMATAWAG SI MOMMY...
PMJR1203

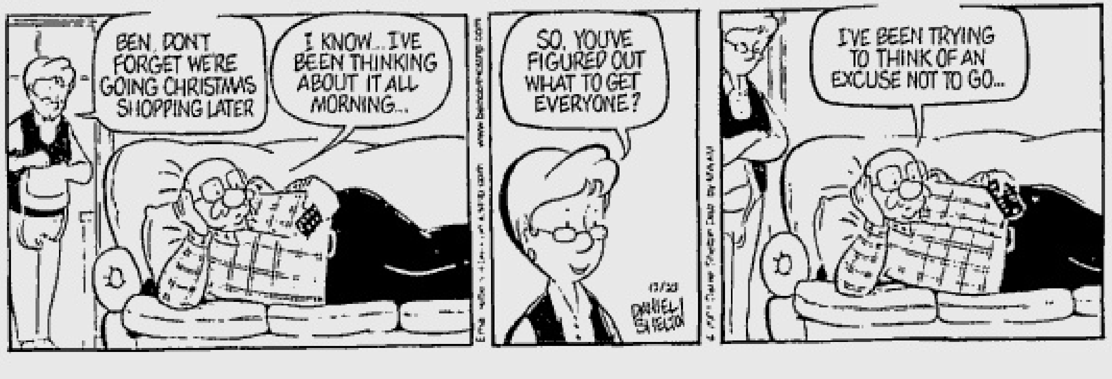
MUTTS BY PATRICK McDONNELL


I'LL FIND YOUR LOST PURR, MOOCH! GIVE ME ITS SCENT, AND MY KEEN SENSE OF SMELL WILL TRACK IT DOWN!
muttscomics.com
SHNIFF SHNIFF SNIFF
12-18
QUICK! —TO THE DUMPSTER BEHIND THE FISH MARKET!

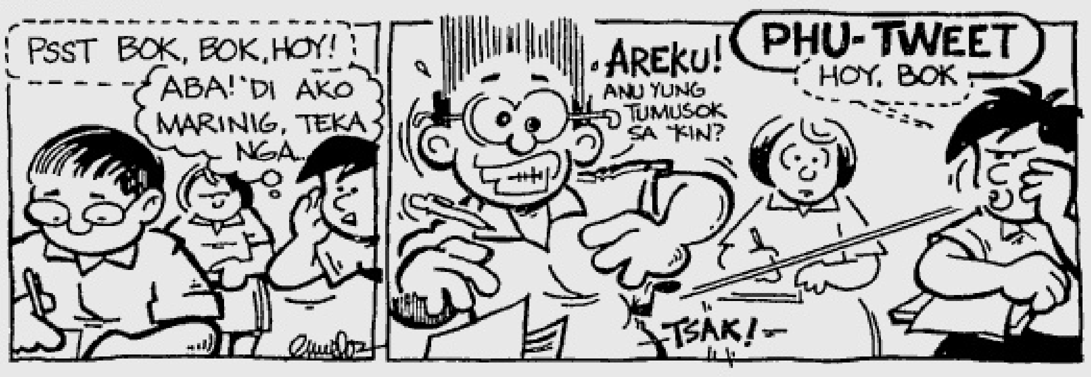
NEWSMARYOSEP BY RON RUIZ


BOS, ITO YUNG CHART NG RATING NATIN KAGABI.
BAKIT MATAAS LANG NUNG LAST 2 MINUTES NG PROGRAM?
E, BOS... INAANTAY YATA NILA YUNG KASUNOD NA CHINOBELA.

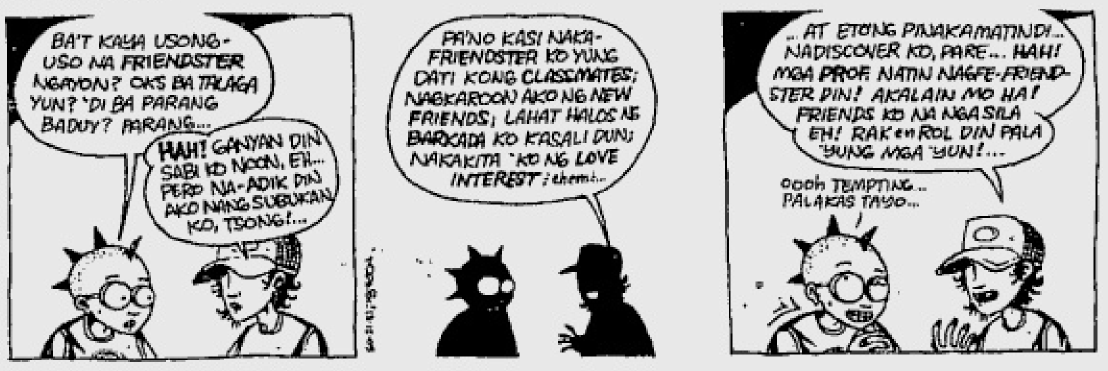
BEN BY DANIEL SHELTON


BEN, DON'T FORGET WE'RE GOING CHRISTMAS SHOPPING LATER
I KNOW... I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT IT ALL MORNING...
SO, YOU'VE FIGURED OUT WHAT TO GET EVERYONE?
I'VE BEEN TRYING TO THINK OF AN EXCUSE NOT TO GO...
12/18
DANIEL SHELTON

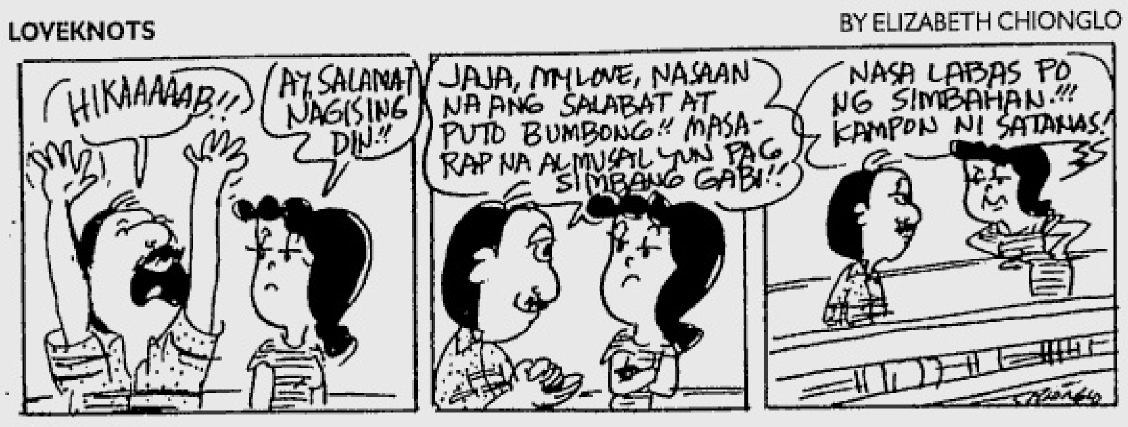
GENG'S GAMES BY AMIEL RUFO


PSST BOK, BOK, HOY!
ABA! 'DI AKO MARINIG, TEKA NGA.
AREKU!
ANU YUNG TUMUSOK SA 'KIN?
PHU-TWEET
HOY, BOK
TSAK!

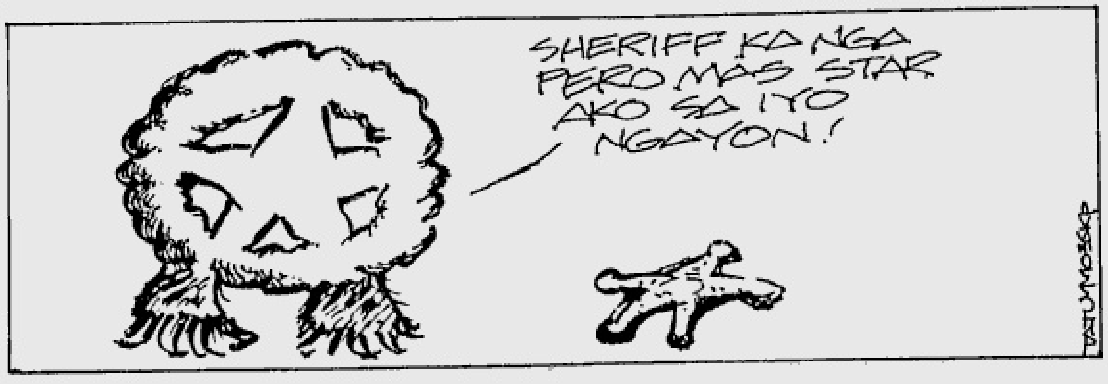
KIKO MACHINE BY MANIX ABRERA


BA'T KAYA USONG-USO NA FRIENDSTER NGAYON? OKS BA TALAGA YUN? 'DI BA PARANG BADUY? PARANG...
HAH! GANYAN DIN SABI KO NOON, EH... PERO NA-ADIK DIN AKO NANG SUBUKAN KO, TSONG!...
PA'NO KASI NAKA-FRIENDSTER KO YUNG DATI KONG CLASSMATES; NAGKAROON AKO NG NEW FRIENDS; LAHAT HALOS NG BARKADA KO KASALI DUN; NAKAKITA 'KO NG LOVE INTEREST ; ehem!..
...AT ETONG PINAKAMATINDI... NADISCOVER KO, PARE... HAH! MGA PROF NATIN NAGFE-FRIENDSTER DIN! AKALAIN MO HA! FRIENDS KO NA NGA SILA EH! RAK en ROL DIN PALA 'YUNG MGA 'YUN!...
oooh TEMPTING... PALAKAS TAYO...

LOVEKNOTS BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


HIKAAAAAB!!
AY SALAMAT NAGISING DIN!!
JAJA, MY LOVE, NASAAN NA ANG SALABAT AT PUTO BUMBONG!! MASARAP NA ALMUSAL 'YUN PAG SIMBANG GABI!!
NASA LABAS PO NG SIMBAHAN!!! KAMPON NI SATANAS!

TULDOK BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


SHERIFF KA NGA PERO MAS STAR AKO SA IYO NGAYON!
TATUMOSKAP

Special recipes for Christmas day

By Dorothy MJ Ferreria
Contributor

CHRISTMAS dinner is just a few winks away, and most of us are already in the midst of preparing for a special menu for family and friends.

Here we have a nice chicken and rice dish, a spin-off from the more familiar paella; osso buco, similar to our native *mechado*; and a light, refreshing meal-ender called fruited canonigo.

To all those who have been reading our weekly menu guide since Day One, may you all have a merry Christmas! Happy cooking!

Baked Chicken Thighs with Savory Rice

¾ c raw glutinous rice (*malagkit na bilog*)
1/3 c regular rice
2 tbsp butter
2 tbsp olive oil or corn oil
1 tbsp pounded garlic
¾ c chopped onions
½ c chopped celery stalk
½ c finely chopped carrots
¾ c finely chopped canned mushrooms
¼ c chopped parsley (optional)
½ c chopped chorizo de bilbao or Chinese ham
salt and pepper to taste
200-g can tomato sauce
16 pcs chicken thighs
1 tbsp butter for greasing
2 tbsp soy sauce
1 ½ tsp calamansi juice
1 tbsp orange marmalade

Combine the *malagkit* and regular rice in a bowl. Wash well, then transfer to a rice cooker. Pour in an adequate amount of water and cover. Cook until done.

In a frying pan, pour in the oil and the butter and place over medium heat.

Add the garlic and sauté until it begins to get fragrant. Add onions, celery, carrots and canned mushrooms. Continue to sauté until the onions become transparent. Add parsley, chopped chorizo, salt, pepper, tomato sauce and cooked rice. Mix well. Remove from heat and allow to cool at room temperature for at least 15 minutes.

Transfer to an ovenproof dish that was previously greased with butter. Arrange the raw chicken thighs on top of the rice. Bake at 350°F for one hour, basting the chicken pieces with the prepared soy sauce mixture every 15 minutes.

For the basting sauce combine the soy sauce, the *calamansi* juice and the orange marmalade.

Italian-Style Braised Beef Shanks

3 tbsp olive oil or corn oil
2 tbsp butter
1 tbsp well-pounded garlic
1 c coarsely chopped onions
2 c carrots cut into thin strips
½ c celery stalk, sliced diagonally
1 pc bay leaf (laurel)
3 cans tomato sauce (400 g each)
½ c red wine or cherry brandy (optional)
salt and pepper to taste

For osso buco:
2 pcs beef shanks (beef kenchi), sliced 2 inches thick (approx. 1 kilo)
2 tbsp olive oil or corn oil
2 tbsp butter

Dry beef shanks thoroughly with paper towels. In a large frying pan, heat up 2 tbsp olive oil. When the oil is hot enough, add butter and allow it to blend with the oil.

Add the meat and let cook for 3-5 minutes or until light golden brown. Invert the meat and cook the other side for 3-5 minutes more. Set aside.

In a large stockpot, heat up 3 tbsp olive oil. Add butter and allow to melt. Sauté the garlic until it begins to color. Quickly add onions, celery stalk and carrots. Continue to sauté until onions become transparent. Add the laurel leaf and sauté until fragrant. Pour in the rest of the ingredients except for 1 can tomato sauce. Cover the stockpot and allow to boil. Simmer for at least 2 hours or until the beef is fork-tender. Add more water if necessary.

A pressure cooker may also be used. Cooking time is approximately 45 minutes. Start timing only when the pressure cooker begins to make noise.

Remove the beef and transfer to a platter. Add the remaining can of tomato sauce to the sauce and allow to simmer for 5 minutes. Correct seasonings if necessary.

Pour the sauce over the beef.

Fruited Canonigo

Caramel:
1 1/3 c white sugar
1 c water
2 tbsp butter to grease molders

Meringue:
1 c egg whites
½ c white sugar
1 tsp baking powder
1 c finely chopped canned or fresh fruits (such as strawberries, kiwi, canned seedless grapes, mango and canned peaches)

Sauce:
½ c white sugar
4 egg yolks
1 c pure full cream evaporated milk
1 c water
3 tbsp cornstarch
2 tbsp orange liqueur (Cointreau or Grand Marnier)

Topping:
fresh/canned fruits, cut up
almond flakes

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

In a large frying pan, combine sugar and water. Place over medium fire and allow to caramelize until light golden brown. Immediately pour caramel into prepared baking pans. Using kitchen towels or mitts, tilt pans to encourage the caramel to completely cover the bottom of the pan. Grease uncoated portions with butter. Set aside.

In a large mixing bowl, beat egg whites at medium speed until fine bubbles form in the surface. Add baking powder and continue to beat for 30 seconds.

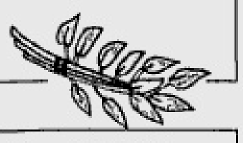
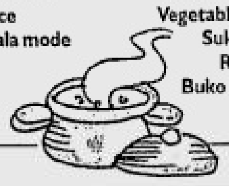
Gradually add white sugar to beaten egg whites while beating at high speed. After adding all of the sugar, continue to beat egg whites until stiff peak stage. Quickly but thoroughly fold in chopped fruits.

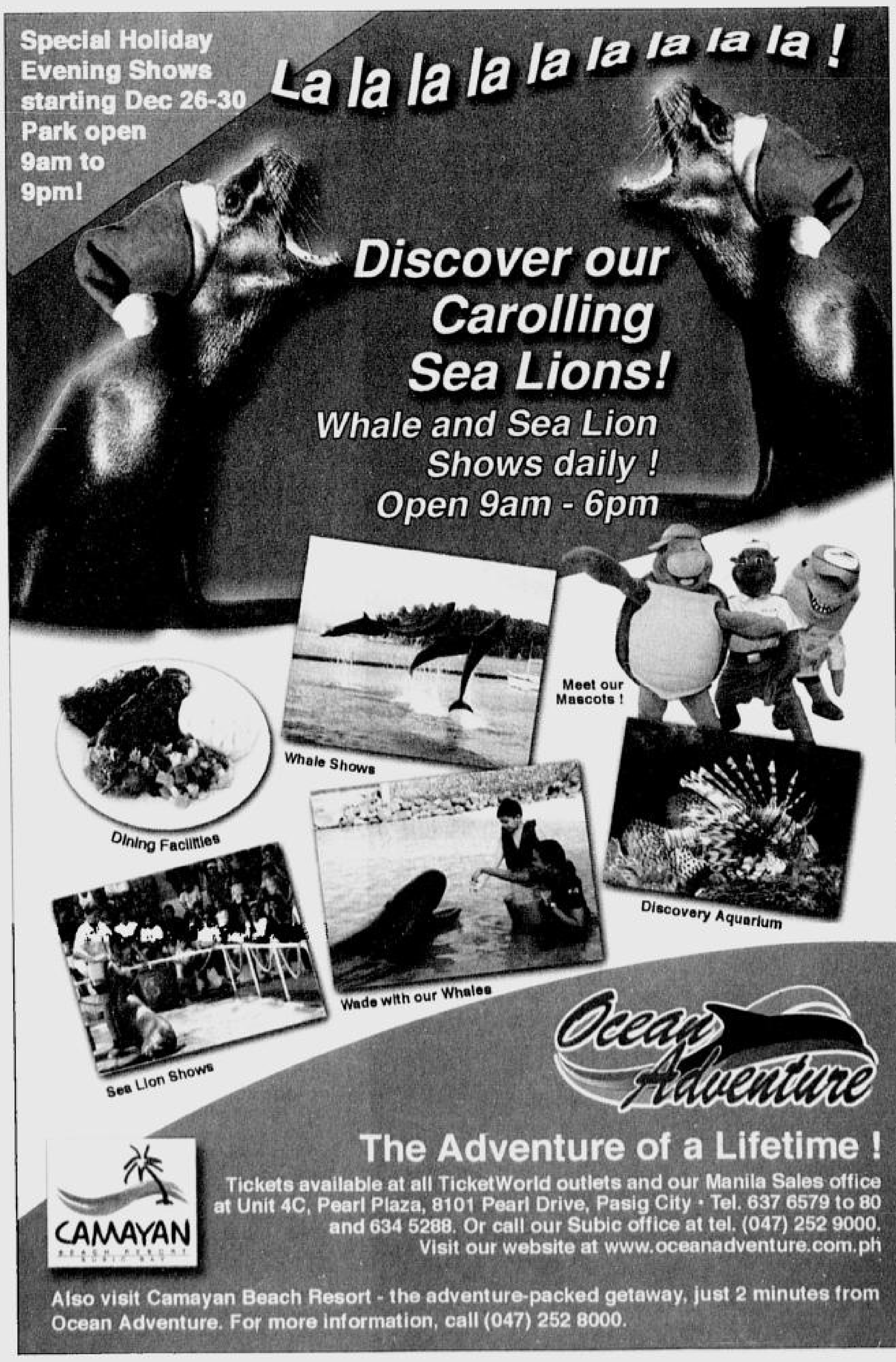
Bake in a baine Marie (water bath) for 30-35 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. The surface of the meringue will be golden brown. Do not forget to add a teaspoon of cream of tartar to the water so as not to stain the larger pan. Keep chilled.

To prepare the sauce, combine the first 5 ingredients in a thick saucepan. Mix well with a wire whip. Cook over low heat until slightly creamy. Stir in the liqueur.

To assemble, pour several spoonfuls of the sauce into a dessert platter. Place a thick slice of the meringue in the center of the sauce. Top with just a spoonful of sauce and garnish with fresh fruits and almond flakes. Add some bottled chocolate syrup or a dusting of cocoa powder if desired.

Dorothy MJ Ferreria offers cooking, baking and cake decorating classes at Dorothy's Cooking School in Quezon City. Call 7217735 or e-mail dorothyferreria@skyinet.net

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
MONDAY	Hotcake with butter and fruit jam Vienna sausage Coffee/hot chocolate/ fruit juice 	Bananas with cottage cheese Steamed chicken with Chinese sausage and shiitake mushrooms Steamed bok choy Pandan rice Almond jelly	Beef steak with onion rings Adobong *kangkong* Rice Fresh fruit platter 
TUESDAY	Corned beef omelette *Pandesal* Butter and cheddar cheese Coffee/hot chocolate/ iced tea	Chinese congee (*lugaw*) *Tokwa't baboy* *Saba con hielo* 	Fish steaks in black bean sauce Gisadong ampalaya Rice Green tea ice cream
WEDNESDAY	Garlic rice *Longaniso* Fried eggs Coffee/chocolate/fresh fruit juice	Clear soup Chicken afritada Rice Canned fruit cocktail with ice 	Roast beef Prawns thermidor Potato salad Paella Chocolate cake
THURSDAY	Assorted *kakanin* Pan-grilled ham Cheese platter Coffee/hot chocolate/ iced tea/ salabat Fresh fruits	*Macaroni salad* Embotido Roast chicken *Halabos na hipon* Rice Assorted cakes and pastries	Creamy *kalabasa* soup Tossed green salad with garlic mayonnaise Baked chicken thighs with savory rice Osso buco Fruited canonigo
FRIDAY	Cereal and milk Spanish sardines Pan de sal Butter and native cheese Coffee/hot chocolate/iced tea	Vegetable chopsuey Sweet and sour fish Rice Fresh fruit platter 	*Sinigang na pata ng baboy* Rice Sweetened garbanzos
SATURDAY	Garlic rice Daing na bangus Coffee/hot chocolate/ fresh fruit juice Fresh fruit platter 	Chicken *tinola* Rice Maruya ala mode 	Miso soup Vegetable tempura Sukiyaki Rice Buko sherbet
SUNDAY	*Taho* Assorted bread Assorted cold cuts Cheese platter Coffee/hot chocolate/ iced tea Fresh fruit salad	Grilled chicken, squid, catfish and pork *liempo* Fresh vegetable *lumpia* Red eggs and tomato salad Rice Assorted *kakanin*	*Clam soup with misua* Breaded porkchops Rice Fresh fruit salad



Special Holiday Evening Shows starting Dec 26-30 Park open 9am to 9pm!
La la la la la la la la la !
Discover our Carolling Sea Lions!
Whale and Sea Lion Shows daily !
Open 9am - 6pm
Meet our Mascots !
Whale Shows
Dining Facilities
Discovery Aquarium
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Sea Lion Shows
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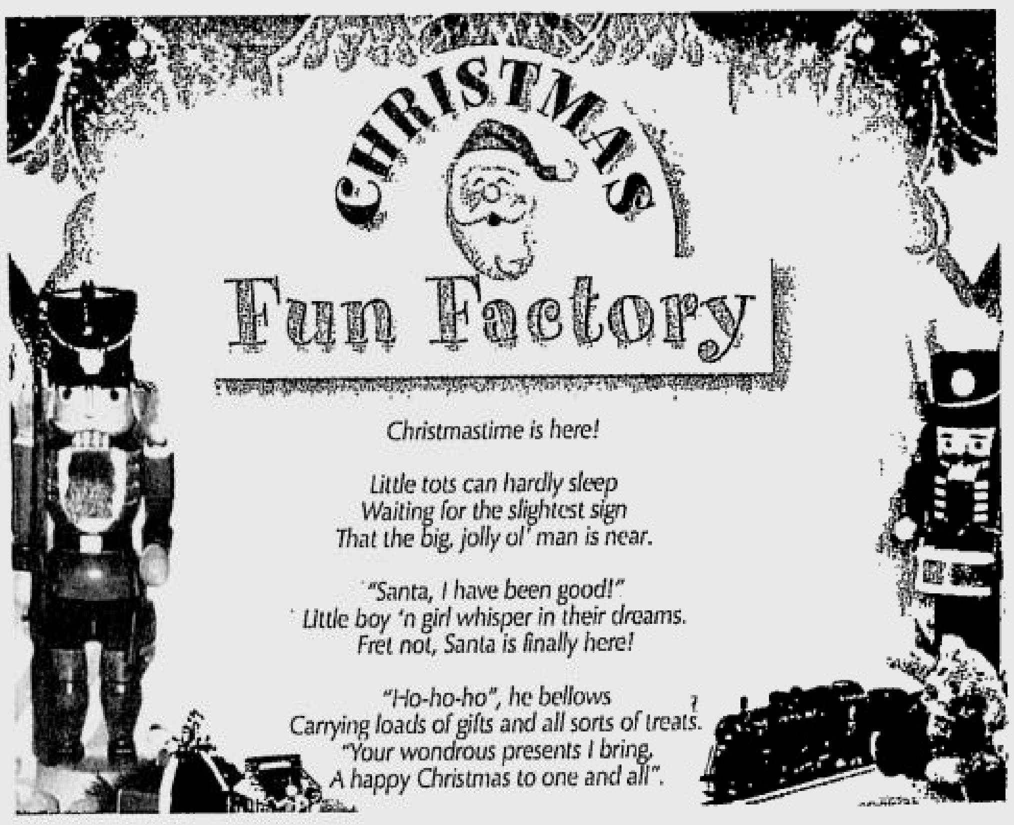


Christmastime is here!

Little tots can hardly sleep
Waiting for the slightest sign
That the big, jolly ol' man is near.

"Santa, I have been good!"
Little boy 'n girl whisper in their dreams.
Fret not, Santa is finally here!

"Ho-ho-ho", he bellows
Carrying loads of gifts and all sorts of treats.
"Your wondrous presents I bring,
A happy Christmas to one and all".

Intimate Indulgence at the Rotisserie
Celebrate a luxurious Christmas Eve Dinner amidst the quiet and elegant confines of the Rotisserie. Classic set menus are offered with entertainment by a string quartet.
December 16 to 24, 6:00 pm to 11:00 pm

New Year's Eve Dinner Special is a toast to finer things in life…to the bounty on the table…succulent prime rib as main attraction!
December 31, 6:00 pm to 11:00 pm

Holiday Celebrations at the Court
Pavilion Court presents a sumptuous lunch and dinner set menus that feature a bit of everything for one well-rounded Yuletide meal.
December 16 to 25, lunch and dinner

Welcome New Year's Day the Pavilion Court way…indulge in a bounty of oriental favorites. We offer a rich spectacle of food – from beginning down to the last bite.
January 1, lunch and dinner

A Harmony of Flavors at Café Coquilla
Café Coquilla features a horde of splendid tastes on Christmas Eve. Gather around the warmth of family for a Noche Buena buffet that befits the holiday pleasure.
December 24, 6:00 pm to 11:00 pm

Christmas Fun Day Brunch is every child's holiday wish! Café Coquilla is transformed into Santa's magical village as funny clowns, lovable mascots and ol' Saint Nick welcome families. Face painting will keep kids entertained while enjoying a delightful buffet spread!
December 25, 10:30 am to 3:00 pm

New Year's Eve Dinner Buffet will satisfy cravings from sweet to spicy and everything in between as this enormous buffet is unraveled.
December 31, 6:00 pm to 11:00 pm

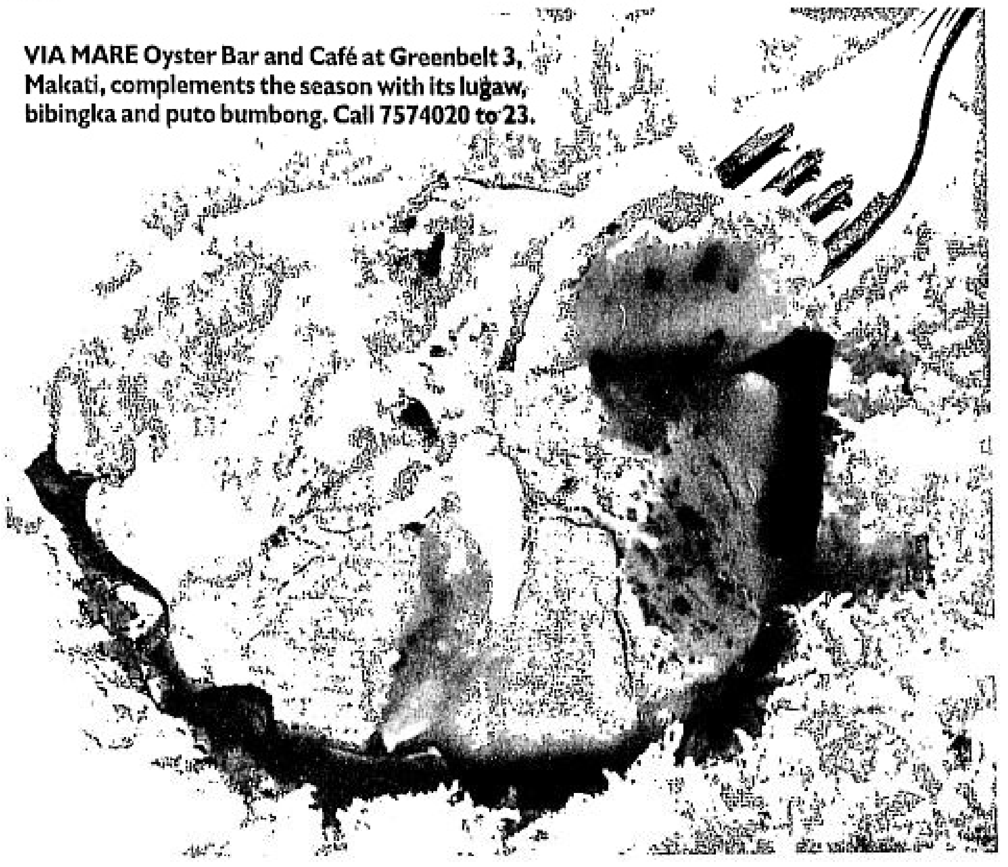
New Year's Day Brunch with a punch. Merry-making is relentless as the abundance of food, wine and fun continues on New Year's Day.
January 1, 10:30 am to 3:00 pm

Countdown at the Music Room
Welcome the New Year with zest! Party all night with live band music, an array of hors d' oeuvres and feast full of roast specialties plus Champagne and sparkling wines.
December 31, 9:00 pm to 2:00 am

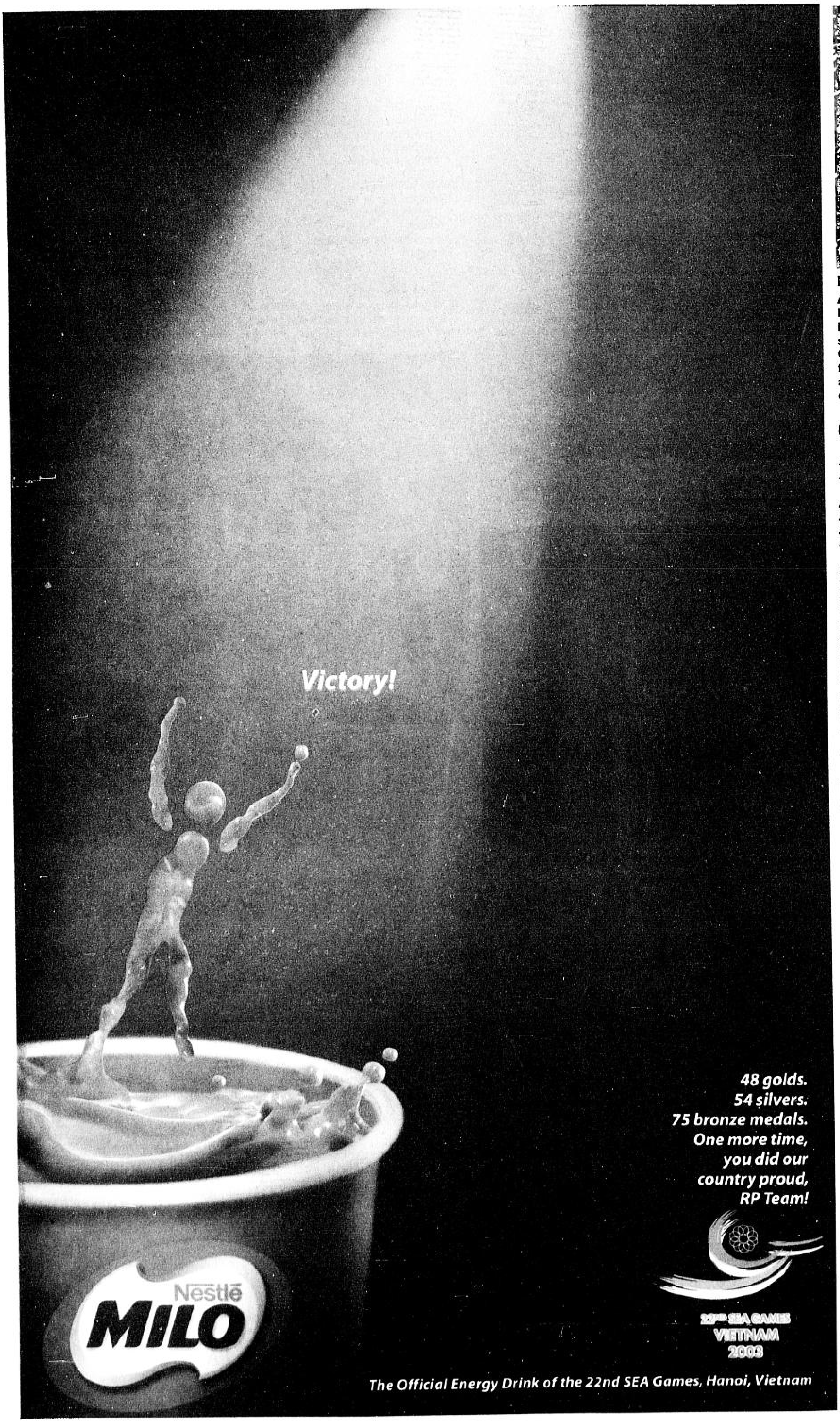
For inquiries and reservations, please call 526-1212 extension 2408.

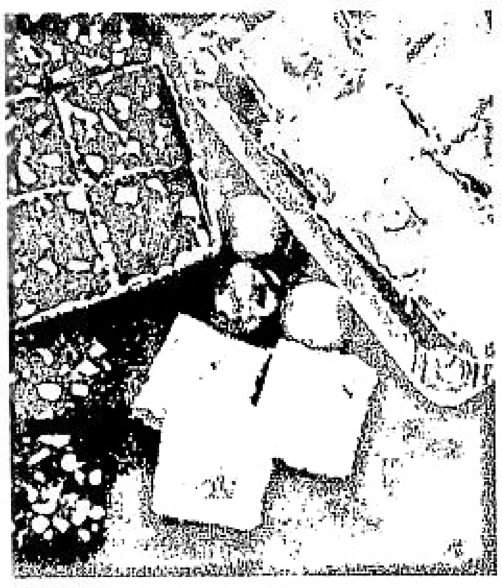
MANILA PAVILION
United Nations Avenue, Ermita, Manila 1000, Philippines
Tel. (63-2) 526-1212 • Fax (63-2) 526-2552 • e-mail: info@manilapavilion.com.ph

BURGOO presents Buffalo Chicken Wings, Mozzarella Sticks, Quesadilla, Chicken Tender Fingers, Supreme Sampler, pizza, pasta, salads, subs n'burgers. Burgoo is located at 310 Tomas Morato extension, South Triangle Diliman, QC; Podium, Ortigas Center, Mandaluyong; and Power Plant Mall, Rockwell Center, Makati.



VIA MARE Oyster Bar and Café at Greenbelt 3, Makati, complements the season with its lugaw, bibingka and puto bumbong. Call 7574020 to 23.





HOLIDAY BROWNIES AND CARAMEL CAKES
Levs and Denz Pastries offers treats at A. Mabini St., San Roque, Marikina City. The special packages, which can also be your Christmas giveaways, come in four sizes: P40 for eight-piece pack, P60 for 12, P75 for 15 and P210 for 48. Call 4572454, 0917-6964496 or 0916-4158911.

Cooking classes resume January

ALL cooking and baking classes at the Reggie Aspiras School of Culinary Arts will resume in January. Meanwhile, holiday treats are now available by order only.

Mini Liquor Cake pack—bourbon, whisky grand marnier and wine cake (P400); Mini Rum Cake gift pack—mixed nut, *dalandan*, chocolate truffle and apple banana (P400); individual liquor cakes (P400); Reggie's Classic Christmas Killer Caramel Fudge Cake, P275, standard can, minimum 1 dozen; P175, bottle, minimum 1 dozen; Sinfully Gooey Food for the Gods, P400 per can; Salmon and Caviar Cake, P1,000.

Also available are Christmas dishes to go like roasts: turkey, beef, salmon, sea bass, lamb and duck; paella, bacalao, salads, pasta, desserts, canapes, etc.

Call 9289296, 9273008 or 6335162, 6474744.

Mall holds food and gift show

WHETHER preparing for noche Buena or simply looking for exciting food treats to give away to family, officemates and friends, The Wonderful Christmas Gift and Food Show is the place to be.

The exhibit opened yesterday at The Megatrade Hall 2, 5/L SM Megamall, and will be up until Dec. 21.

Various food companies are supporting the show, including Nestlé Cream, Carnation Evap, Century Canning, Swift Mighty Meaty, Swift Corned Beef, White King Hotcake and Waffle Mix, Selecta Moo, Sunkist Juice Drink, Mrs. Fields Cookies, Chips Delight, Smileys, Louis Maclean wines and spirits, Potato Corner and many others.

Nestlé holds a series of cooking demonstrations entitled "Cooking with Carnation Evap and Nestlé Cream" at the event stage area everyday at 1 to 2 p.m.

RFM will likewise have "A Complete Recipe from White King Hotcake and Waffle Mix" seminar on December 20 at 3-4 p.m.

"A Tupperware Experience" will be presented everyday until Dec. 19, from 5-6 pm, while Century Canning will launch its new Argentina Corned Beef Barbecue and Argentina Meat Loaf Tocino Style at the exhibit.

Other exhibitors offering holiday food treats include Love's Recipe's homemade cheese spreads, pasta sauces, liquor cakes, and dips and dressings; Jammies Home Baked Goodies' ensaymadas; Friends Star's "best buko pandan in the Metro;" and offerings from Connie's Kitchen, Kookai Delicacies, Navarro's Janivieve Bakeshop, John Little and others.

Call 8129099 or 8123973.